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TEX: A Chapter in the Life of ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS

WHILE I REMEMBER

THE UNBURIED DEAD

BY

STEPHEN McKENNA

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TO

L. R.

IN

ADMIRATION, GRATITUDE

AND

AFFECTION

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"When the intellectual developments or culture of a race cease to accord with its old-established institutions, the necessary result is a combat in which the latter are overthrown. This is called a revolution. Until this revolution is complete, so long as the reform of those institutions does not agree at all points with the intellectual development, the habits and the wants of the people, during this period the national malady is not wholly cured and the ailing and agitated people will often relapse into the weakness of exhaustion and at times be subject to fits of burning fever. When this fever is upon them, they tear the lightest bandages and the most healing lint from their old wounds, throw the most benevolent and noble-hearted nurses out of window and themselves roll about in agony, until at length they find themselves in circumstances or adapt themselves to institutions that suit them better."

HEINE: *The Citizen Kingdom in 1832* (forming part of *French Affairs*); Letter VI, 19 April, 1832.

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A WARNING TO ANY THAT READ WHAT FOLLOWS

A SUMMARY, if short enough, is fatal to any work of imagination: in briefest epitome, the Iliad *is a protracted story of the bloodthirsty feud between the relations and friends, on either side, of a runaway wife and a vengeful husband. And to the unimaginative record of fact, as I have been realizing with increasing force since first I planned to write an apology for my life, a short summary can be equally disastrous. How, I wonder, would these confessions be described if they passed out of my control into hands for which they were not intended?*

I wonder, too, whether I do wisely to meet charges which might otherwise be forgotten. As I have never appealed against the verdict of society, the utmost I can hope now is that, if all the facts be known, I may be judged more charitably; and opinion in England has been growing more tolerant, since first I went to live there. On the other hand, opinion may undergo a reaction. "A profligate! A liar! And a cad!" *That was my label from the hand of him who must be called the last of the unburied dead, though he himself, poor gentleman, was buried long since, grey-haired with sorrow that brought him to the grave before his*

time. The next generation may think that he was mealy-mouthed. Who shall say? A writer in the days of the Regency, not foreseeing the advent of Victorianism, might have said that England in his day was becoming more tolerant, perhaps more lax, in opinion. If I am to appeal at all, it must be while my offence is fresh and before the superior court has time to differ in fundamentals from the court that tried me; if I do not seek compensation, still less am I willing to risk an increase of sentence. Should I appeal, though, at all?

The duty of justifying myself was, indeed, imposed on me by others; and I began my defence on the morrow of a visit from one of the few men whom I have admitted to the island-sanctuary in which I am paying my debt to society. If not among the greatest novelists of our time, Humfrey Barlow is at least one of the most experienced; and on his last night under my roof he lay back with a smile and a sigh, lamenting that present hospitality and old friendship restrained him from making his next novel out of my life.

"I feel you're a problem, a challenge, a test-case," he kept saying. "Society has ejected you; is that the fault of society or of you?"

And this idea of conflict and defeat was still engaging his mind when I took him on board the inter-island steamer and he murmured "Saint Helena" at the spit of white sand and palm-trees to which I was returning.

"If I had one single quality in common with Napoleon," I said, "I would begin to write that book to-day."

"You present the same contrast for anyone that has heard of your other state," he answered. "Come, come! If a pallid little man on a remote island in the Atlantic told you that he had been emperor of the French for half a generation, you would think that his vicissitudes of fortune were worth studying. I, who remember you as an inconspicuous boy, an inconspicuous undergraduate, an inconspicuous young bachelor in London, feel that there must be something worth studying in the vicissitudes of fortune that have brought you here."

*Had I lacked modesty in taking up the burden which he pressed upon me, I should have been effectively discouraged by Barlow's repeated use of the word "inconspicuous." At the time of the scandal, I feel my friends were saying: "Arthur Weston? He's the last person I should have expected!" Some men seem to attract adventure, others to repel it; and, contrasting myself with the men who have won social limelight in the last five-and-twenty years, I have always said: "*You *are not the sort of person to have a great romance.* You *are not capable of a great passion. A Quixotic renunciation is not in your power. It is not in your power to defy the lightning."*

And yet I not only defied the lightning, but evoked it. I made a supreme renunciation. I succumbed to a great passion. And, if I do not call my life an unbroken romance from the age of thirteen, it is only because I am waiting to hear "romance" defined. As I write these lines, the grey king-palms are turning black against the setting sun. In a moment the afterglow will mount the sky like a blush spreading over a

young girl's cheek. And, when night descends on our island like an extinguisher, the fire-flies will glimmer till a vast, honey-coloured moon rises almost under our hands to create the black and silver world that is too much akin with the theatre to seem wholly natural. If this be the setting for romance, I have found it only a week from New York and a fortnight from England, at an age when most men have ceased to feel romantic.

So it has been these many months. So, please God, it will continue until the end, though I still share Barlow's amazement that these "vicissitudes of fortune" should have overtaken my "inconspicuous" self. I can write without bitterness now; and, if I have set The Unburied Dead *at the head of this sheet, the phrase is not my own and I employ it because I see now that the drama, tragedy or scandal of my life was made inevitable by the struggle which "the unburied dead" opposed to a changing economic order. If I finish my task, it will have grown from a personal apology to a social history. The efforts of an effete group to preserve caste without working for it occasion all the financial shifts and matrimonial intrigues that lie in the background of my own drama. To some extent, the losing battle fought by the Ashdowns between the South African War and the Great War is representative of all their class. It was a battle that opened in the gas-lit days of Mr. Gladstone and closed among the shrouded lights of Mr. Asquith; and that quarter of a century covered my adolescence and early manhood.*

Has this changing economic order been accompanied

by changing moral standards? To quote Barlow again: Is it my fault or the fault of society that I was ejected? For me at least only one answer is possible. I set down the facts and leave any that may read to judge me.

CHAPTER ONE

An Amateur Englishman

"Semper ego auditor tantum, nunquamne reponam?"
JUVENAL.

I

"A PROFLIGATE, a liar and . . . a cad." The words were Lord Ashdown's; and, although it was my misfortune that he applied them to me, I cannot challenge his right. At the time when he spoke them, more than fifteen years ago, pacing up and down his library at Market Ashby in a tattered smoking-jacket at four o'clock in the morning, I was neither a liar nor a profligate. He was too angry to pick his language with judgement though he hesitated perceptibly before his climax; I felt that he had suddenly recollected my American parentage, and was exploring for the ultimate expression of invective understood on both sides of the Atlantic. Whether my behaviour then or later was that of a cad, I must leave others to say. At the time of the scandal the committee of my club was pressed to ask for my resignation, if it could not actually expel me, on the ground that my conduct had been "unworthy of a gentleman".

"What a mercy that my father is not alive!"

I said to myself, for it was to become a "gentleman" that he sent me to England as a boy of thirteen.

The scene of this momentous decision was laid in the dining-room of his house on Fifth Avenue; the time was a late summer evening in 1897; and some friend, calling to sympathize on my mother's death, had asked what my father proposed to do with "this young gentleman". My father, who had by now seen enough of me to wonder how any small boy could so devastatingly disorganize a well-conducted household, snorted at the unmerited compliment and demanded of his friend bitterly whether a school or a penitentiary afforded the better prospect of making me a gentleman. Feeling the atmosphere to be hostile, I withdrew to my own quarters. On my return, my father informed me that I was sailing for Europe in a week's time, that his London attorneys were choosing me a school, and that, when I came back, he hoped to find me shaping with greater promise for the position which he had created for me.

Though he bracketed the two ideas, my father did not define at this season what he hoped to make of me, nor explain the position which I was to inherit; and, if I were sanguine of understanding his mental attitude towards his only child, I should have now to explore why he sent me away to become at all costs something other than I was born. Did he fear thus early that I should never find my feet in the country of my birth? Was he dismayed by the volume of wealth which he was obstinately

amassing for me? Did he hope that my education in England would set mere money in due perspective? I can imagine no other reason why I should have been kept in ignorance, until I grew up, of the position that the Westons filled in the plutocracy of New York.

Or was he harking back to the days before he became an American citizen and thinking to make of me something that he had never been himself, something that could not be made nor bought in America? After a lecture-tour throughout the States, Humfrey Barlow confided to me from the distant security of London that in Ireland there was no middle-class and that in America there was nothing else. A republic unembarrassed by hereditary titles has the greater leisure to examine industrial origins; and of ten people who knew of Arthur Weston as president of the Ribling Steel Corporation, eight were aware that he had started as a working smelter. Did he aspire to win for his son a social pre-eminence denied to himself?

Perhaps he really felt, as he so often proclaimed in those troublous weeks after my mother's death, that New York was not big enough to hold the two of us; and, having decided to secure his own peace by putting the Atlantic between us, he may have tried to cloak his shortcomings as a parent by pretending that he was parting with me for my own good. Day by day in the week that remained before I sailed he was certainly organizing my life for me with all the detailed care and long vision that he devoted to his business. After my English school

I must go to an English university; I was given letters of introduction to friends who would continue the good work of civilizing me in my Christmas and Easter holidays; and in the summer he ordained that I should come back to America. Presumably he wished to ascertain, year by year, whether I was yet a gentleman. . . .

"Then that's fixed," he concluded with relief, and turned to other business until it was time for him to bid me good-bye.

Our parting was amicable; and, when he saw me on board the *Caucasia* and presented me with a Bible and a copy of *Tom Brown's School Days*, I fancy that my father was more perplexed than hostile. A thirteen-year-old baby had been laid on his unprepared door-step; and he had no idea what to do with it.

So, without regret or rapture, I said good-bye to the country of my birth and to the author of my being. As the first dozen years of my life were passed for the most part in hotels, with an invalid mother, I feel that I know less of America than a man like Barlow, who spent twelve weeks travelling and lecturing. So little root did I throw out in these years that, when I was transplanted, it was as though I was being bedded out for the first time. I suppose I lost one nationality; and I am not sure that I ever gained another. The England that I was entering obliterated so quickly my impressions of New England that I can paint no picture of myself at this time; and, in the absence of independent witnesses, I surmise that I must have been

such another as young Harvey Cheyne in the opening chapter of *Captains Courageous*, "*more to be pitied than anything*" in the opinion of one man, "*the biggest nuisance on board*" in the opinion of the others.

Had my father read that entrancing book? Was it even published when he shipped me to Europe? Of one difference between Harvey Cheyne and myself I am so conscious that, on reflection, I believe my father contrived it deliberately: Harvey was always bragging about his pocket-money and his private cars and his father's thirty millions; I was not. The difference, however, was due to my greater ignorance rather than to my better taste: I was not to be helped or handicapped, I feel my father must have said, by having my connection with him advertised. Weston is a common name; in the directories of North America there are probably dozens of Arthur Westons. When I sailed to Liverpool in the summer of 1897, I knew no more of my father than that he was "in business", with a house in New York. Presumably he had money, because every one of our world had money; but, if I had ever heard of the Ribling Steel Corporation, I did not associate him with it. Mr. Denman, the wooden-faced London solicitor, filed me away as "*Arthur Weston Junior*"; and my letters of introduction were written by my father's friends about "*a boy called Weston*".

I was welcomed to England by a sallow clerk despatched for the purpose by Mr. Denman; and the first shadow of coming events was cast by a

mysterious clergyman who introduced himself under the more mysterious title of an "invigilator" and paced—in a cap and gown which I thought and still think superfluous—up and down a private sitting-room in an hotel off the Strand while I wrestled with a succession of papers headed *Lanesborough School Entrance Examination, Michaelmas Term 1897*. This was alike the first time that I had heard of Lanesborough or dreamed that I was being sent there. For a moment, reverting to the spoilt only child, I thought of resisting the fate that was closing in on me; and I hope it is a sign of grace that, when I went home to spend my last night with Mr. Denman, I urged him to give me helpful information about the school to which—a telegram apprised me—I had been admitted.

"Lanesborough?" echoed Mr. Denman. "Why, Lanesborough *School*, of course!"

And I was too much abashed by my ignorance to protest against the English habit of taking English institutions for granted.

When I left the train next evening at Gloucester, I was possessed of an emergency five pounds from the London solicitors and of the power to call on my house-master, the Reverend Richard Arkwright, for two shillings a week pocket-money. That, said Mr. Denman, was all I should need: my father, quite properly, did not believe in spoiling a boy. I was possessed also of an uneasy feeling that England was bigger than she looked on the map and that an untravelled American of thirteen, with no friends and—by now—a disconcerting desire to make a

few, occupied but a lowly place in the public-school system. This feeling I rank among my assets.

Would that friend Barlow were with me to-night! Though he has probably forgotten the moment when we met in our house-master's study, health-certificates in hand, this should be his moment for pointing out the lieutenant of artillery who is to be, not emperor of the French, but a hanger-on at his court, before declining on St. Helena. Barlow should now be marking down a rather forlorn little boy surrounded by metal-bound American trunks and busying himself with an unmistakably English play-box presented to him by his father's London solicitor. The youngster is being watched by a boy even smaller and more forlorn, to whom he shyly offers a wedge of walnut-cake. Soon, too soon, the feast is interrupted by a veritable giant, who tells the melancholy revellers not to block the gangway. With no more material than this, the omniscient dramatist could expound that out of the sixty boys in that house these three are already linked together.; this is the "Beginners, please" call in a play that will include scenes in the divorce-court and on an almost deserted island. That walnut-cake was presented by a character who will make her first entry in the next act. And the whole of the company will be brought in, one after another, on the casual, unpremeditated introduction of these three.

For this reason, I cannot omit all reference to Lanesborough.

CCC. No: 178

II

My first night at school was psychologically important in that I discovered a human being, well-fed, warmly clothed and physically healthy, who was at once more shy, more lonely and more generally miserable than myself.

This was the white mouse of a boy with whom I shared my walnut-cake. Christopher Young's home and parents were in India; like me, he had never been to school before; and, whereas I had travelled from London to Gloucester by myself, he had fallen in with three nameless tormenters who had watched —and reproduced later for his benefit—the valediction and kiss of some one called "Aunt Margaret". As I was soon to discover, there is no time-limit known to boys when the threadbare joke may decently be discarded; and Christopher Young only escaped the obsession of his aunt when he left the train. We met half-an-hour later, with rubicund Humfrey Barlow and the rest of the new boys, in Arkwright's study, where we shook hands, disclosed our names and furtively tried to identify our housemaster in the faded groups of whiskered athletes hanging round the walls.

Then, keys in hand, we separated in search of the matron. Young at this point fared better, for, not finding her, he ceased looking for her; I, being untuned to reverence, asked the way of the tall, omnipotent-looking creature who had already told me not to block the gangway and who, I now discovered, was Canford, the captain of cricket, a man

of devastating rages and superhuman strength. Discreetly abandoning my quest of the matron on this word, I pulled my boxes out of the corridor and joined Young by the fire in a panelled and vaulted Elizabethan hall until a voice cried " I say, that's pretty cool, you know! A couple of new boys bagging all the fire." By that time Young wanted only a place where he might die unmolested; I could have proved to my father that New York was big enough to contain the two of us that night. We drew together and compared notes.

If it was part of my English education to be shewn my own insignificance, the lesson was learned before I had been at Lanesborough half an hour. Canford, indeed, had noticed me in order to clear me out of his way; his brother-prefects, Butler, Gregory and Venne, strode backwards and forwards through Hall in immense frieze coats and knitted mufflers, without even noticing me. The " study-boys ", after a nod to the prefects and a handshake with the " heads of Hall ", clattered off to exchange visits of ceremony with their fellow-braves in other houses, without observing the new-comers to their own. The heads of Hall bantered the fags, but were not interested in things lower than fags; and the fags themselves were too busy stowing food into their lockers and criticizing their seniors to pay any attention to us until Arkwright tacked the dormitory-lists on the notice-board. Then Fairburn, a red-haired boy with china-blue eyes and a snub nose, discovered that " three new swine " had been " landed on " him.

"Johnson! Weston! Young!" he roared. "Let's have a look at you! Do any of you snore?"

We hurried in from the corridor where, spontaneously, as the house-door swung closed on the departing heels of protective father or brother, eight of us had collected to exchange names and answer questions. In forty years of varied life I have met but two men who confessed that they had no sense of humour and one who admitted to snoring. We made haste to deny the imputation; and Fairburn passed to the consideration of our personal looks and cleanliness, My accent provided a diversion; and he christened me "Sam", adding that he had never met an American before. The general reception, when we were noticed at all, was truculent but kindly; for the most part, however, no one had much attention to spare from the stream of flies that rattled through the archway and over the glistening flags to deposit more and yet more members of Arkwright's at the south-west corner of the quadrangle. From seven o'clock until prayers I listened to names, examined faces and prospected for possible friends. At nine Arkwright entered and took call-over, clawing at his beard and cocking a suspicious eye at each "*adsum*". After prayers, all except study-boys dispersed to their dormitories.

If our schooldays are to be reckoned in general the happiest, we must except the first of all. Any one that has never undressed or slept in public will understand my embarrassment in facing the

critical eyes of an alien civilization. By lagging a garment and a half behind the rest, I gained time to observe the technique of Fairburn and found that, while face and hands were washed from obligation, to brush one's teeth was optional at bedtime; a shirt could be worn for two days, not so a collar; and, unlike Rugby in the days of Tom Brown, at Lanesborough no one minded whether anyone else said prayers erect, recumbent, kneeling or not at all. The dormitory, already unheated, was made colder by Fairburn's insistence on open windows. "Ungodly frowst" was his description of the chill September atmosphere; and I earned his mingled contempt and ridicule by my underclothes. "I say, this frowsty beast wears combinations!," he announced; to which his neighbours and allies, the moon-faced Hazell and the languidly dandified Brickdale, replied dispassionately: "He *must* be a frowster."

I was struggling to overcome a confusion that still sends the blood to my cheeks, when the door opened and Canford enquired:

"Which of you chaps is Weston?"

"I am, sir," I answered.

"Don't call me 'sir'," he said, advancing to the foot of my bed and holding out a muscular freckled hand. "You only do that to masters. My father's had a letter from Mr. Denman—you know him, don't you?—asking me to look out for you. You've not been in England before? I thought you might like to fag for me."

From his manner—and, still more, from a glimpse

of Fairburn's grimace of envy and congratulation—I deduced that a favour was being conferred and thanked him with an enthusiasm which strove to mask my lack of understanding. I believe I told him that that was "bully" and observed on his face a lack of understanding that matched my own.

"Right. Fairburn and Hazell will put you up to the ways of the place. Good-night."

For half-an-hour after lights-out Hazell discoursed of my good fortune, only punctuating his congratulations with an occasional reminder that Canford had the straightest eye with a cane ever known at Lanesborough. "You can usually trust him to draw blood," was the cold, terrifying refrain to the song; but, if I was too easily frightened, at least my first sense of insignificance had merged in the knowledge that I was now a part of Lanesborough. I fell asleep dreaming of ways in which I might serve the first man I had found to venerate; and this though he had seen my effeminate combinations.

When I awoke, it was to hear Young gently sobbing to himself in the bleak, unfriendly waste of the moon-lit dormitory. Fairburn woke too and emptied the contents of a pistol-squirt on the sufferer's face. The sobbing stopped. I made up my mind to befriend Young, who, after all, had not been chosen to fag for Canford. . . .

"If you shew you're home-sick, you'll only be ragged," I told him with more intuition than experience.

For myself, in the first few days, I was too busy learning the ways of the place to feel home-sick. Arkwright, my form-master, was humorously paternal, when he was not being passionately unjust; and my bondage to Canford, too, made me feel that I was no longer a lost dog. For the rest, Young and I, quickly christened "the white rabbits", were methodically pushed into chapel and Upper Third form-room, introduced to Gant's, the tuck-shop, and Vigors, the book-shop, instructed in bounds and convoyed to the playing-fields in the Close. Hazell was responsible for our education; and, as he stood to suffer from defects of teaching, nothing was left to chance. Through the thickening mists of thirty years I can still see him leading us round the school buildings, nodding a big head and explaining the rules with a look of awful gravity on his round, pale face. Six strokes of a cane like Siegfried's sword awaited us for the slightest transgression of a code which he bloodthirstily invented as he went along. If the day was chilly, he explained, the prefects caned to warm themselves and to keep their eye in. New boys were always caned in their first week, so that the prefects might see, once and for all, whether they had any spirits to break. If a cane split in mid-execution, the strokes already administered were not counted and the sentence was carried out afresh from the beginning.

I believed it all until a chance question revealed that Hazell himself had been two years at Lanesborough without being thrashed. . . .

III

It was perhaps poetically just that, the first time I was called to the judgement-seat, Hazell should precede me.

Fairburn had enjoyed three days' unalloyed happiness with his pistol-squirt, shooting at us in the dormitory, in form, at call-over and once, greatly daring, in chapel, before the rest of us decided on reprisals and wrote to London for pistol-squirts on our own account. When they arrived, Fairburn organized a north-and-south campaign in Attic Dormitory: Johnson, Hazell and himself against Brickdale, Young and me. We were unevenly matched, as my pistol had not arrived from the shop and I had to arm myself with a sponge; it was the worst kind of irregular fighting, for we had no objective or test of victory; and I imagine that the battle, on any strict theory of warfare, could be ended only when one side blinded the other with water and seized its weapons.

We had no time to reach this extremity, as Canford entered after the first salvo.

"Water-pistols!," he cried. "You dirty little beasts! Hand them over! Hazell? Young? Johnson? Brickdale? Weston? Oh, you've not got one. Lucky for you! Put on your trousers, you others, and come down to my study."

As they began to dress—in the world-silence that a man must feel as he mounts the scaffold—, I thanked Heaven very humbly that the London shop had not sent my pistol. When it arrived, I

would sell it at old-metal prices to the first comer from another house. Fairburn, who despised "frowsters", might have been observed putting on football shorts under his trousers; and Hazell's ferocious eloquence about corporal punishment had deserted him. I felt most sympathy with Young and wondered, with the academic detachment of virtue, whether pain to come was made greater by previous knowledge.

Rather to my surprise, no one died, no one fainted. They were all back in dormitory within five minutes, indecently elated and indecorously anxious to shew and compare wounds. Young was the greatest revelation, for my fellow white-rabbit returned a full-grown and initiated man.

"*You* got it tight," said Fairburn feelingly.

"I hardly noticed it," bragged Young. "Gregory said 'That's all; you can get up.' I was jolly near asking him when he was going to begin."

I found that they were speaking an alien language and discussing a psychological experience in which I had no part. Some seventeen years later, while America was still neutral and before I went out with the Red Cross, I knew the same feeling of abashed exclusion.

"If my pistol had come at the same time as yours . . . ," I began in a determined endeavour to elbow my way into the conversation.

"Oh, you're a pet of Canford's," Fairburn snapped.

Now, in the matter of water-throwing, I was as guilty as anyone. Canford had made the possession

of a pistol his test of crime; but, though I had escaped with a whole skin, it was on a technicality which excluded me from this exhilarating discussion as effectively as if they had swum ashore from a sinking ship while I was cramming myself into a boat before the women and children.

"I'll black your eye for that, Fairburn," I said.

"I'd like to see you try!"

I tried . . . and failed.

"Now go and sneak to Canford," he sneered. "He's going to! You *scab*, Weston!"

I raced to the door and reached the stairhead before they could overtake me. A floor below, Main Junior, Middle and Upper Dormitories were humming with conversation; a floor below that the studies were wrapped in dignified silence. I walked bare-foot to Canford's door and, in the light of Hall fire, caught sight of myself in blue-and-white striped pyjamas. Heroism is proof against everything but ridicule; and I wandered into the passage to reflect. Arkwright came out of his dining-room and unlocked the letter-box. When he was gone, I looked at the letters which he had spread on the window-seat and found one addressed to "*The Viscount Canford*" in a sprawling, school-girl hand with which I was to become very familiar in later years. . . .

"Hullo! What the deuce are you doing?," demanded Canford, as I timidly knocked and entered the shabby, twelve-foot-square cabin, which with his book-cases and photographs, his cups and

challenge-shields, was a more enviable home for a man of ambition than the White House.

The prefects were refreshing themselves with a muscle-forming supper of cheese and beer. A formidable cane, bound at either end and notched with the record of previous executions, lay exposed on the table with greater publicity than good taste warranted.

"I've brought along your mail," I said.

"'Letters' we call them in England. But why are you out of bed? You know there's no fagging after nine."

"I was coming to see you anyway. I was in it with the rest of the bunch, Canford," I explained dismally. "I hadn't gotten my gun from the store in London, so I used a sponge; but you could put out Hell with the water I scattered."

Canford covered his mouth to hide a smile. From behind him Gregory asked suspiciously:

"Who sent you down to say this?"

"No one!," I protested indignantly, though I was trembling; and Hazell had told me that it was doubly painful to be caned when you were cold.

"Then why are you looking for trouble?," asked Canford. "You'd like me to thrash you, to set your mind at ease?"

"I wouldn't like it at all. But I'm just not going to let up on the syndicate."

The offer of trousers was refused. In part I was too much excited to care whether he hurt me or not; in part I could not face Attic Dormitory;

in part I wanted to get my punishment over before my courage evaporated. Canford, who had been growing momentarily bigger, displayed the efficiency of a master; and I spent five minutes in the dark passage by Arkwright's dining-room, writhing and gasping for breath. He explained years later that he suspected me either of wanting to shew off my contempt for pain or else of playing the romantic hero of school-boy novels. "If you were so anxious to prove your heroism, I felt I had to give you the opportunity," he told me.

On my way upstairs I was overcome by an extraordinary sense of strength and exhilaration. I, too, was a grown and initiated man; my conscience was clear; from "Bend down" to "You can go" I had not moved or spoken; I had faced my ordeal in pyjamas; and Canford had shaken hands with me. All this counted to me for glory next day, for I was hardly bigger than Young; but for the moment I had greater matters on hand than the pursuit of popularity.

"I *said* I'd black your eye," I whispered, as I flung myself on to Fairburn's bed.

Capital punishment, commuted to imprisonment for life, is a descent from the sublime to the ridiculous; and, after execution, to be hung in chains is an indignity. This, I fancy, was the collective feeling of Attic Dormitory when, still bruised and tender, we were sentenced by Arkwright to five hundred lines apiece for wilful damage to property. Vainly we protested that the prefects had already dealt with us. Some of the water had penetrated

through floor and ceiling to our house-master's study; and he hinted in sudden fury that another word from any of us would cause the lines to be doubled.

Though the injustice cried to Heaven, I believe it might, even so, have been forgotten if Arkwright had not held us up to ridicule before boys from other houses.

"Take down these sentences for Latin prose," he ordered in third school, as he tilted his chair and fingered his beard in preliminary warning of humour to come. "One: 'If the barbarian had not destroyed his master's books, he would not have been punished.' Two: 'When Orbilius asked the barbarian if he repented of his wickedness, he promised never to do wrong again.' Who was Orbilius, Weston?"

"A school-master, sir," I answered sullenly.

It was superfluous for anyone to speculate who was the "barbarian"!

"And, Hazell, the construction after verbs of hoping and promising? . . . Three: 'The little boys were angry, because (they said) Orbilius was too cruel to be just.' You will not translate 'they said', of course . . ."

"If I don't get level . . . ," threatened Hazell for the eighth time, as we sat round a table in Hall that afternoon, fuming, declaiming and doing everything but the unjust imposition.

"What can you *do* to the swine?," clamoured Fairburn. We now sat amicably side by side, though his left eye was discoloured and my own

lip was cut. Then a study door opened; and he added: "*Cave.*"

Canford, on his way to the Close, paused to take stock of us.

"Why aren't you chaps at punt-about?," he asked.

"We're doing an impot for Arkwright," Hazell answered, pointing to virgin foolscap and an unopened *Aeneid*. "He says we've ruined his books . . ."

"But you've been thrashed for that once. If you've hurt his precious books, he can put 'em down in the bill."

We were under orders not to leave the house until the lines had been shewn up, but Canford was taking all responsibility; and, when Arkwright called for the impositions after prayers, he intervened by saying:

"Oh, may I have a word with you about that, sir?"

We were not admitted to the later rounds of the fight; but after lights-out Canford came to Attic Dormitory with an air of great coolness and self-control.

"I'm afraid you chaps will have to do those lines," he began. "Arkwright's good enough to say that I exceeded my authority. If you like to go to the Head . . . I'm sorry."

I had seen Carpenter, the Head, in chapel and at call-over. He was an austere ecclesiastic of few words and frigid manner. The Sixth stood in awe of him; the assistant masters became deferential

when he spoke to them, and, more often, scattered in flurry to their rooms when he came into the quadrangle. However good our constitutional case, if Canford was not prepared to fight it, six groundlings from the Upper Third and Lower Fourth were not going to court publicity for the sake of a paltry five hundred lines. We were beaten for the moment; and, though we continued to vow that we would have our revenge, it is probable that Arkwright would have been spared by our natural shortness of memory, if a cause of offence had not come from outside.

IV

LANESBOROUGH was the scene of my first romance; and it is more than time to introduce Miss Doris Merton, especially as for ten days I had conducted a sparkling correspondence with her, punctuated on her side by gifts the most acceptable to a boy of unappeasable appetite. To this day, I could not enter Fuller's nor see the square, white, cardboard box and the flourish of red lettering without in imagination smelling and tasting again her ethereal sponge-cakes with the sugar icing and constellation of walnuts. I know now that Doris could not afford to send me walnut cakes; but, as she once said, "If you don't buy a thing because you can't pay for it, by the time you can afford it you won't want it."

We had met on the *Caucasia*, when Doris was returning from a tour of the States with the family of a Liverpool shipowner who paid her expenses in

return for companionship and, I suspect, example. Mrs. Harborough and her daughter lacked the high polish which the ambitious chairman of the Starling Line expected of his house; and Doris possessed breeding, manners and, even at seventeen, the wide experience of an alert, observant girl who had drifted with her father through the country houses of England with eyes wide open for plunder. I should not like to say at what age she had discovered that her first duty was to establish herself. The same day that saw Miss Rebecca driving away from Miss Pinkerton's academy in Chiswick overheard her—for her whisper was "rather loud"—declaring that Mr. Joseph Sedley was "very handsome". And, as Doris habitually likened herself to Becky, I may without unkindness follow her lead, though she had more good-nature in her smallest finger than Miss Sharp in all her body.

I should feel but little surprise if Doris had been surfeited with her companions, less if she was drawn to me by ties of common loneliness, though I should like to think that she was being disinterestedly kind when she packed her sea-sick charges into their state-room and accepted my forlorn companionship in preference to that of the men who wanted to flirt with her. At Liverpool she promised to write; and she kept her promise. And now the one thing that turned my thoughts from the injustice of Arkwright was a letter, dated from Gloucester, enquiring when we could meet. The Sandhayes match, our greatest social and sporting event of the Michaelmas term, was taking place the following

Saturday; and I invited Doris to it, adding such instructions on dress as ensured that she should do me credit. When she came, I was abashed by my audacity in asking her. Melting brown eyes smiled at me over the collar of her ermine coat and a single curl peeped provocatively from under her little ermine toque. From Arkwright's to the Close we were followed by an envious crowd; and Doris walked as though it was but natural for her to put on her best clothes for me. In behaviour, too, she did me credit, asking all the right questions and shewing proper enthusiasm as the team strolled out of the pavilion, arm-in-arm in their blue-and-white shirts, black stockings and white shorts.

"That," I whispered, "is Canford. I'm his fag."

And she was conscientiously excited by the information.

I forget who won the match, because my attention was diverted to greater issues. Five minutes after half-time, there was an unexpected blast from the referee's whistle; and Canford hobbled off the field on one leg. He called me in passing by to fetch him a cab, then told me to send one of the other fags when he saw that I was not alone.

"Please let me go," I begged.

Doris came forward and bit her lip as she saw the lump below his knee.

"Isn't it frightfully painful?," she asked. "You ought to see a doctor, you know."

"Oh, it's nothing," answered Canford; and to me: "Find Hazell or Fairburn . . ."

Already, however, I had set out at a run past the line of elms to the Close gate. When I returned, Doris had pulled up a chair ; and some one had found Canford his scarf and blazer. Acquaintance had opened promisingly, for, as I came within earshot, Doris was saying :

" You'll have to stay in bed, you know, Lord Canford. It *is* a bore ! Would you like me to come and see you ? I'm staying at Barrow Hill and I'll bring you some flowers, if you like."

" That's awfully kind of you, Miss Merton," answered Canford.

I ought, of course, to have been jealous ; but I had known Doris for a month and staked out a claim on her. Moreover, I was plotting an adventure that left no time for jealousy. In driving back past the Greyhound I had decided that Doris must come to tea with me. I had omitted to get leave from Arkwright ; but in America persons are greater than principles ; and, when the match ended, we were a mile from prefects and masters. For a happy hour Doris and I gorged ourselves on muffins, poached eggs and ice-cream soda. There was a quarrel over the bill, but I succeeded in paying it ; and she took a gracious revenge by leaving a sovereign in my hand, as we said good-bye.

" If you don't take it, it'll mean we aren't friends," she explained with an irresistibly wistful dignity. " And I was hoping you might get leave to come over on Sunday for lunch. Won't you ? "

" I'd love to, Doris," I said.

" They usually lunch at about half-past one.

Good-bye! I *have* enjoyed myself. And you're a wonderful host!"

During tea—to a boy of thirteen a few poached eggs and muffins at five constitute no bar to roll, butter, jam and sardines at half-past six—, I submitted to the envious curiosity of Hazell and Johnson. During prep., Butler, who was prefect of the week, roused twice from his own labours to murmur sarcastically: "Whatever happens, you won't overwork yourself, will you, Weston?" By staring at the fire I had found a grouping of coals and flames which gave me the brown eyes of Doris Merton looking over the high collar of her ermine coat.

"Weston! *Weston!* WESTON!!!" Butler had to call three times before I looked up to see the house odd-man at his side. "Mr. Arkwright wants you."

I dragged myself away from prep.-room, cursing Arkwright for disturbing my vision.

"Mr. Mainwaring is not sure, but he thinks he saw you coming out of the Greyhound to-night. Is that so?," asked Arkwright, after keeping me in suspense for five minutes, while he finished a letter.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"You were there? Without leave?," pursued Arkwright.

"I forgot all about getting leave till it was too late."

"That's no excuse. Leave-out stopped for the rest of the term; and gated at three for a month.

You may go," he sighed; and I hurried back to prep.-room in the hopes of finding the fire as I had left it. . . .

A difficulty which has faced the framers of penal codes from Moses to Macaulay is that, while punishment is finite, crime is by comparison infinite. The ultimate penalty known to school law is expulsion; but at this time Oxford and Cambridge, which might be barred to me thereby, were remote places and unfamiliar names. Perhaps, too, Carpenter would not expel me: I had already seen that the discipline of the school was largely a bluff. With Arkwright's sentence still ringing in my ears, I played with the idea of defying him; and my mind was made up when Doris, calling on Canford with the promised flowers, reminded me of my engagement.

On Sunday, as soon as chapel was over, I changed into brown boots and a grey suit, waited until Arkwright was in his garden and then walked boldly through the quadrangle, missing one o'clock call-over, which shewed that I was absent without leave, and three o'clock call-over, which shewed that I had broken my gate. I raced to Barrow Hill, I lunched, I raced back, vainly urging myself to believe that Doris, wedged between a pair of amorous septuagenarians, had made my sacrifice worth while. With a belated effort to acquire merit where I could, I was back in Chapel ten minutes before the service began. Not until Carpenter walked to the reading-desk did I discover that I had forgotten to change my grey suit and brown

boots; and my most familiar nightmare is still based on my solitary, conspicuous scurry across the quadrangle and Gregory's avenging voice demanding whether I had worn those clothes in chapel.

"I forgot to change," I answered.

"You'd better come to my study at once."

The charge had been recited and punishment meted out before the last stragglers had left chapel. When I returned to Hall, Arkwright was telling every one within range that I was to be sent to him the moment I could be found.

V

THERE is a merciful dispensation of nature by which a later shock drives out the memory of an earlier. Arkwright had seen my unsabbatical clothes and was so deeply scandalized that it never occurred to him to ask why I was wearing them. No doubt, when he had soothed himself by ordering me a thousand lines for impudent breach of a most elementary school-rule, he would have proceeded without delay to the call-over lists which I could see, from the corner of an agitated eye, on his writing-table. I interrupted his logical sequence, however, with the statement that I had already been thrashed by Gregory.

"Gregory? He had no business to do that!," exclaimed Arkwright.

I was disposed to agree, but my own logical sequence was upset by a miracle. Arkwright rose from his chair and picked up his cap from the table.

"Do nothing about those lines at present," he said. "I must speak to Gregory."

He was closeted in Canford's study until tea and again from tea till prayers. Fragments of angry dialogue penetrated the door to Hall. "*It's been the practice of the school ever since* I've *been here, sir . . .*" "*Nothing of the kind . . .*" "*The Head gave a clear ruling; with all due respect, sir, a master has no* locus standi *. . .*" "*I will not be spoken to like this, Canford. . .*"

Fairburn explained to me at tea that I was becoming a leading-case in the constitutional history of Lanesborough. When a prefect and a master were both present, who was the supreme disciplinary authority? Generations of masters had held that, as house-prefects were their creatures, the principal took precedence of the agent; it was maintained, on the other hand, that the prefects were responsible —under the Head and to the Head—for order outside the form-rooms. Once in every generation for a hundred years the controversy had burst into flame; and I guessed now that both Canford and Arkwright were fighting with embittered memories of their earlier conflict over the pistol-squirts. Once in every generation succeeding headmasters had avoided any too exact definition.

"If I find a boy breaking bounds, I'm to look the other way?," Arkwright suggested sarcastically.

"No, sir, the boy should be reported to the prefects," answered Canford.

"Thank you, I'm quite capable of dealing with the case myself."

"But, with great respect, sir, there are some duties that the Head leaves to the prefects, some to the house-masters. . . . You know we can't thrash for smoking; every case of smoking has to be reported to the Head. And any breach of school rules *outside* form-room *has* to be reported to the prefects."

At this point Arkwright finally lost his temper until we could hear him through three inches of oak door.

"*Has* to? *Has* to, Canford? I *have* to come to my own head-prefect for orders?"

One lost temper leads to another; and we cheered in whispers as Canford's voice rose to the occasion:

"If you punish a boy when the prefects have dealt with him, it's rank barbarity, sir. I . . . I think you'd better look for another head-prefect, sir."

We scattered in an ecstasy of excitement, as Arkwright plunged through the doorway.

"I'll see whether the headmaster is disengaged," he murmured over his shoulder in a choking voice. "You forget yourself, Canford. You . . . you forget yourself."

In a manner unexpected by me, the constitution of Lanesborough was threatened by an issue for which there was no precedent. A prefect had never before resigned office. Did he abdicate his study as well as his throne? And who would succeed him? The house hummed like a swarm of bees; committees were formed in the window-seats and

round the fire, all pledged with hysterical enthusiasm to the support of Canford. As the source of all the trouble, I derived a certain reflected glory. This war of gods and Titans raged round me ; Canford, like a new Prometheus, was agonizing for benighted mankind in general and for me in particular ; and, when he interrupted our solemn league and covenant to say I must not touch the lines, Fairburn cheered him.

" Stop that row !," he roared. " This is too serious for fooling. I don't care two pins what he does to me, but we've got the house to think of and you may find yourselves without prefects. That doesn't mean that you're to play the ass. If I'm still here, I'll take it out of anybody who makes a fool of himself."

As he limped back to his study, we crowded to the windows overlooking the quadrangle. Arkwright was seen to enter the Head's house, but we waited vainly for his return. The odd-man rang the bell for prayers, but there was no one to take them. At ten o'clock Gregory sent the juniors to bed. At a quarter-past-ten Gamble raced up from Main Junior Dormitory to say that the Head's butler had come over to fetch Canford.

A year or two later Canford described the appeal to Caesar and Caesar's judgement.

" There seems to be some misunderstanding," began Carpenter in frosty, clerical tones. " I expect the prefects to co-operate with the staff and the staff to co-operate with the prefects." Thus the controversy was buried alive for another generation.

"I don't think you really imagine, Canford, that Mr. Arkwright was going deliberately to commit an injustice; it was the principle involved. . . . Am I right? And I'm sure that, if you let slip any expressions that were distasteful to Mr. Arkwright, a word of regret . . ."

"I don't see that I've anything to apologize for, sir," said Canford stiffly.

Carpenter permitted himself a bleak smile which he tried to recall before it could be brought up as evidence against him.

"My dear Canford, a 'gentleman' was once defined as a man who had the moral courage to apologize when he was in the right. You're in a responsible position; we can't allow civil war in one of the houses."

And so, ingloriously, the revolt flickered out. I was told on Monday that I need think no more of the lines; and I still remember my cold horror as I stood again in the familiar study and saw the call-over lists folded and unread.

Three days later, in form, Arkwright leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"For Latin prose," he announced, "I will dictate sentences on the use of *ut* with the subjunctive. One: 'The boy was so greedy that he risked everything'—I gave you a phrase for that last week—'in order to dine with Lucullus.' Who was Lucullus, Weston?"

"A-wealthy-Roman-noted-for-the-magnificence-of-his-table," I answered by rote.

"Two: 'Some eat to live, others live to eat.'

Any one who puts that into the infinitive will go to detention school for the rest of the term. Three: 'The barbarian was so frightened for three days that the merciful Orbilius decided not to punish him further.' How do we translate 'the merciful Orbilius', Weston?"

"*Orbilius, vir clementissimus*," I hazarded.

"And who was Orbilius?"

"A school-master, sir."

"Sentence four . . ."

I liked Arkwright for that. Five years later, when I was head-prefect, I asked him what he would have done if he had looked at the call-over lists before espying the grey suit and brown boots. He confessed that he had no idea; and I liked him the more. Between thirteen and eighteen, however, it is easy to preserve two or three conflicting loyalties; and, though I accorded Arkwright the tribute of being a "sportsman"—a word still new in my vocabulary—, I was devoted, body and soul, to the man who had championed me against oppression. I was to be given an opportunity of repaying my debt to Canford—shall I say in the third act of the drama?—; and I think that I paid it with interest.

The Earl of Ashdown, were he alive to read this apology, might be surprised to find this lingering gratitude in "a profligate, a liar and . . . a cad."

CHAPTER TWO

First Love

"*Undershaft:* Like all young men, you greatly exaggerate the difference between one young woman and another."

BERNARD SHAW: *Major Barbara.*

I

TOWARDS the end of term, Canford tossed me a letter dated from *Ashby Hall, Market Ashby, Leicestershire.*

"My father wants to know if you'll spend Christmas with us," he explained.

"It's . . . awfully kind of you!," I gasped. "I'd promised Young . . ."

"Bring him along too. I've a brother and sister about your age. Butler and Venne are coming for the New Year; and your friend Miss Merton may be of the party."

Such an invitation, from the head of Arkwright's to the two youngest and smallest fags, was too flattering for us to refuse; and, some ten days later, Chris and I had the honour of driving—very silently—in Canford's fly and of sitting—very decorously—in his compartment from Gloucester to Market Ashby. To put us at our ease he described

Ashby Hall, with a warning that we must be prepared to find everything somewhat dilapidated, and enquired whether any of my countrymen would care to modernize it.

" It's not a bad place. There's a ghost thrown in ; and no son has succeeded his father since the last Abbot of Ashby cursed us . . ."

" You want to sell it ?," I asked.

" No, no, no ! *Let* it. Ninety-nine years or nine-hundred and ninety-nine. Look about you when next you're in New York."

I knew enough of English to realize the difference between letting and selling, but I did not grasp how a sale outright differed substantially from a nine-hundred and ninety-nine years' lease. The idea of finding a tenant, however, intrigued me less than the prospect of staying for the first time in an English house with ghost and family-curse complete. As stone yielded to brick, brick to stucco, stucco to half-timber, and half-timber again to stone, I fell to thinking that I too had a part in this English heritage, that my grandfather—if of humbler rank than Canford's—was of no less purely-bred English stock and that a whisper from an English graveyard might, without undue stretch of fancy, be welcoming me home to the land where my father was born and all but my father were buried. This day, more than any other, and this journey, more than anything else, accomplished my denationalization.

The position of Ashby Hall I had tracked through the pages of an atlas in the school library ; and,

when we arrived in the fading light of early afternoon, we found an Elizabethan mansion—isolated and forgotten—in the deepest heart of Leicestershire, with an Italian garden at the back and, in front, a succession of lawns sloping gently to a reed-choked river. At first sight, for all that I had been warned by Canford, I was more impressed by the disrepair of the place than by its size and stateliness. There was no central heating, no electric light; and to thirty or forty bedrooms there was not a single bath. The timber in the park was fit only for firewood; and even the ivy on the front of the house flapped drearily in the wind like the torn cover of a book. I was not observant enough to guess, from any signs at school, that Seymour Canford was poor; I was not yet English enough to understand how an incubus became tolerable by being three centuries old.

"You should let it," suggested Doris within five minutes of her arrival, as we were taken for a tour of inspection.

"The difficulty, as I was telling Weston, is to find a tenant who would sink forty thousand pounds in improvements," answered Seymour doubtfully.

"Mr. Harborough might," she mused.

We continued our tour; and I at least had forgotten this brief conversation when Lady Ashdown let fall that the great Liverpool ship-owner and the daughter whom I had seen for a moment on the *Caucasia* three months earlier were coming to Ashby for a week after Christmas. I did not

know, I told Doris, that the Ashdowns and the Harboroughs were friends. As yet, she replied, they were not even acquainted; but, if this house and family were not to fall into ruins, it was time for some one to take them in hand. It was more than time, she added, for some one to take the Harboroughs in hand, if their possibilities were to be realized. I learned now that Mrs. Harborough, after flirting with death at every bronchitis season, had at last been accepted; and, though the widower bore his loss with fortitude, Doris gave me to understand that she was taking the family under her protection.

"I asked Lady Ashdown to invite them," she explained. "It ought to be rather a jolly party."

When Galsworthy's *Justice* was staged and I was introduced to "Cokeson", the managing clerk, he reminded me of Doris in his desire to have all things "jolly". Here were James Harborough, she was saying, with a mourning-band round his arm, and Jessie with the Starling Line millions in her lap. Here, too, was old Benjy Merton in debt and Doris herself unattached. It would be more than jolly if Seymour married Jessie; and a problem as old as herself would be solved on the day when Doris brought Harborough home to a renovated Ashby Hall, which should contain one snug corner in it for her wastrel father. I write with later knowledge, but I believe that the contriving, despoiling brain was already at work by our second day at Ashby.

"I can't do anything till I've got *him* off my

hands," confided Doris, aged seventeen, with a nod towards her father, who was making himself monotonously agreeable to every one in turn.

She always thought aloud, usually without caring who heard her; and I, who imagined that fathers—other than my own—accepted responsibility for their children, was amused to find her treating Benjy, as I soon came to know him, rather as a ne'er-do-well younger brother. The discovery made me regard with new interest a type which I was meeting for the first time. Benjy and his like, I suppose, are more commonly found in a settled civilization than in new and growing countries, but they make their appearance, in pioneer shacks and mining camps, when there is a crumb more of food than the miner and settler need for their own bellies. Though I never knew him in his prime, I have been told that, on the day when he left the army, Benjy adopted the profession of perpetual guest. Good-humoured and unassertive—save when pressed to leave one house before securing admittance to another—he had drifted up and down England as a bachelor, then as a man who could be invited without his wife, and, finally, as the harmless father of an attractive daughter. He played all games, knew all scandals, composed all quarrels, discussed the latest books, talked brightly to the shy and listened patiently to the tedious. In moments of financial crisis he was made secretary of a trust company or manager of a proprietary club. An assistant kept the work from interfering with his regular

profession; and he became once more a gentleman of leisure when the dead season had passed or his debts were paid or the wandering fever once more warmed his blood. The variegated social class to which Old Benjy belonged was united, so far as I could see, by the twin conventions that it was bad form to keep one's head above water for long, but worse to let a fellow-member sink for the third time.

After one venture in matrimony, Benjy was not disposed to acquire new moorings, though even he—I suppose—wondered occasionally whither he was drifting. When I first met him, I was but thirteen; and I envied any man his encyclopædic knowledge of life. Two years later I found him tiresome; and, when I in my turn had travelled and learned something of men and women and stayed in his favourite houses, I saw him only as a parasite, a snob and a bore. Doris, with her impersonal judgement, must have divined that his day was nearly over; with her Robin Hood love of feeding the poor from the cut purses of the rich, she made Benjy her first care. If not my care, I have made him my study for the length of these few lines, because it is impossible to understand Doris without understanding first her feeling of responsibility for her father. When, in the early years of her married life, she was one of the most widely-discussed women in London, her friends and enemies were alike in saying either: "*Doris, in spite of that father . . .*" or "*What else could you expect with a father like that?*"

II

I HAVE sometimes felt that I should have liked to hear what the Ashdowns and the Harboroughs made of the vital, dazzling girl who now burst into their lives and took control of their destinies.

In '97, with new friends in a strange house, I was too young to wonder. Raymond Canford, who was training for the navy, and Anita, who at this time was a plump, red-haired child of eight, admitted Chris and me to the freedom of the old schoolroom and nursery; Lady Ashdown, when not preoccupied with servants and minor economies, took me to her heart on hearing that my own mother was dead (and, having said this, I doubt if I need say more than six words about her until I approach the end of my task); and the greatest adventure and discovery of my childhood occurred when I was presented to Lord Ashdown. Tall and clean-shaven but for an inch of whisker, spare and grey, walking everywhere in a square felt hat, black satin stock, tail-coat and pepper-and-salt trousers, with a winter rose in his button-hole and a feeble, half-blind retriever at his heels, he was the English aristocrat as I had read of him in books. His father had seen the ride of the allies through London; his mother, who was still alive, remembered "Boney's" death and Talleyrand's arrival as French ambassador to the Court of St. James. He himself pressed me, on arrival, to drink a glass of "sherry-wine", as the day was more than a little "'umid".

"My son's friends are mine," he announced, as I shook hands; then, turning to Chris: "And this young gentleman? He is your friend? Excellent! Excellent! I shall be honoured if you will always make Ashby your home during your holidays."

Then he stumped off, with the old retriever ambling behind him. At this time he was no more than five-and-fifty; but, though he was only ten years older than Benjy and fifteen years older than his wife, I felt that he had survived from another epoch to which he was ever trying to get back. There had been no poets since Pope, no statesmen since Pitt; and the art of life was cut short when England became industrial. Sometimes, when I met this anachronistic figure in dusty and deserted wings of the house, I guessed that he was day-dreaming of a miracle which should set the place shining with the splendour of the eighteenth century. Raymond would soon be wanting an allowance for the navy, Seymour for Magdalen and the Guards; after that, Anita would marry. It was high time, miraculously or otherwise, to pull things together.

I need hardly record that it was Doris who prattled to me of allowances and jointures, adding —whether it was so many hundreds a year for Magdalen or so many more for the army—: "And the tragedy is, they can't afford it". It was I who enquired innocently why Seymour and Raymond were being embarked on careers in which they could not pay their way; and the blunt question is

perhaps worth setting down, since the frame of mind which it challenged was a vital part of the atmosphere in which my drama came to be played. I was answered by the strangest chorus, consisting of Doris, Benjy and the eight-year-old Anita. They made allowances for an ignorant foreigner; but, with no more discussion than I should have allowed if I were replying to a suggestion that American men should overcome the dearth of American women by taking coloured wives, they let me see that the eldest male Canford always had entered the Guards and always would, that the next son had always been a sailor and that, though—in my hearing at least—there was not a word to be said against "business", it was "somehow", "if you take my meaning", "though it's difficult to explain", well, something that no one had contemplated. Watching old Ashdown in his ramblings and hearing Benjy sympathetically denouncing the recent "Harcourt duties", I grasped—even at thirteen—that the Canfords were becoming poorer not only in every generation but in every year. Yet they did nothing to increase their revenue or reduce their expenditure. What would be their end, I asked Benjy, if these new death-duties fulfilled his fears?

"You can depend on Ashdown to starve like a gentleman," he answered with Gascon loftiness.

"There are so many houses like this in England," Doris sighed, as we waited for dinner on Christmas Eve. The family had not been using the big dining-room since the summer; and a nest of

young owls had been discovered in the chimney. "And so many people like Lord Ashdown. I always call them the unburied dead. If only your friend Lord Canford has the sense to marry a rich wife when the times comes! Or if I really *could* persuade Mr. Harborough to take this place . . . It would tide things over for the time being. And he has no *scope* among those dreadful shipping people in Liverpool." . . .

As I saw almost nothing of the Harboroughs on our way from New York, I have so far said little about them; but, as one of the family was soon to become an important figure in my life, I had better say something of them as they appeared on arrival at Ashby after Christmas. At some time and in some place, both long forgotten, I saw James Harborough standing in front of an electric fan; the wind of the fan agitated very gently a bushy pair of ginger whiskers and chilled the gleaming top of his head till he was constrained to protect it with a white and podgy hand which looked limp and had nevertheless the grip of a vice. By then he had come to wear gold spectacles; and his invariable white waistcoat was even better filled than at our first meeting. His trick of rocking backwards and forwards as he talked always made me think of a tumbler-doll; and, when I should have been listening to him, I was almost irresistibly tempted to push him on his side and watch if he could swing erect by the weight of his massy feet. So, with little change, he continued until our last meeting; so, with little change, I

remember seeing him first, as he descended with his lymphatic daughter from a single-horse brougham that might have been bestowed, with horse and coachman, on Sir John Canford when King Henry the Eighth presented to him the lands and monastery of Ashby.

"She only wants a decent maid and six months' coaching in other people's houses," said Doris with her disastrous habit of thinking aloud.

We were flattening our noses against the morning-room window, Raymond, Anita and I, eager for a glimpse of the new-comers. As in certain households a strange name is met with the question: "*Could I sell him a horse?*", so at Ashby a strange name coupled with a reputation for wealth always inspired the question: "*Would he take this place?*" Raymond was impressed by Harborough's fur-coat, Anita by his unconventional magnificence in tipping the coachman, the butler and the odd-man who came to help with the luggage. And, though magic is not to be analysed, I feel that the strength of Doris and the weakness of the Ashdowns were revealed—to the discerning—in the moment when they allowed one stranger to foist other strangers upon them at a hint that a "deal" might be born of the meeting. Doris, as usual, was prospecting farther than prejudiced and intolerant eyes could see.

"He looks a bit of a bounder," said Raymond.

"He is," she agreed, "but he's not a fool. Six *weeks*' coaching by a clever woman . . . Let's

put them at their ease! I want them to create a good impression."

With the zeal of missionaries and the courage of lion-tamers, we hurried into the hall. Of Jessie, at this time, with her regular features and good colouring, the worst that could be said was that she was suffering from educational dyspepsia. She spoke tolerable French and distrusted her accent, fair German and was ashamed of her vocabulary. In the course of their American tour Doris had bullied her into such self-confidence that she no longer described the Kreuzer Sonata and the latest Sousa march indiscriminately as "just too utterly divine"; but, looking back with the eyes of experience, I can see that Jessie had much to learn.

Her father, if a more backward pupil, was at least upheld by a more dogged determination to succeed socially. At first, indeed, until Doris wooed him from the defensive, he openly derided and secretly feared a party of fellow-guests whom he regarded as effete but cunning. "I don't let myself be put upon by *all* your lords and ladies," he announced truculently, after Benjy had addressed him as "Harborough" and he had retaliated with a "*Mister* Merton". Where he found no antagonism, in the first days, he sought to create it; but Doris' power of putting people at their ease may be measured by the fact that, when I went back to Lanesborough, he was still in occupation.

My last and clearest recollection of him at this time is rooted in a chance meeting when we children were playing "hide-and-seek" and Harborough

burst into "the King's Room" in which Anita and I were concealed under a four-poster bed. He carried a note-book and was conducting a private survey, "as I always like to do," he informed us, "when I'm offered a 'bargain'." Abandoning our game, we drifted in his wake from room to room, listening to his muttered soliloquy on plumbing, lighting and heating. So, if the house had been a ship and the bedrooms cabins, he would have equipped each with the same tip-up basin, electric stove and fan, all supplied at wholesale prices. I was delighted, for the business-like compactness and uniformity of a ship charmed me more in those days than the casual taste of a family that had employed Grinling Gibbons to adorn its hall in one generation and the Adams to decorate its dining-room in another. Anita, if less delighted, was more impressed: it was the first time, I fancy, that she had met complete efficiency.

III

THIS shadowy, half-forgotten party at Ashby seems to have been followed by a wholly forgotten period which I can best bridge by saying "*Two years elapse.*"

I remember, as relevant to my theme, that Seymour Canford went up to Oxford, that I tumbled into new friendships and, in general, that I accepted without question what I now see must have been a strangely rootless life for a young boy. At the end of each summer term I was taken to Liverpool

by one of Mr. Denman's clerks and handed over to the captain of the ship that was to bear me across to New York; on my return it was my father who saw me off. The intervening five weeks were spent in the house on Fifth Avenue or in a summer hotel in Maine. During the winter I stayed with English friends; and once, when my programme broke down, I put up at the Savoy and treated myself to the pleasures of London until my funds were exhausted and my startled solicitors clapped me under the charge of a tutor.

I must have been a curiously independent and detached small boy, without—really—parents or guardians or home or country, living with grown-ups in hotels and on liners, saying little, hearing much and always accepting what the day brought. While these two years were passing unremarked away, I was propelled every term or so into a higher form. I was given a study to share with Humfrey Barlow, already a prolific contributor to *The Lanesburian*. And, whenever the Mertons drifted down to Barrow Hill Court, Doris insisted that Lady Grey should invite me over for a meal. So far as I can recall, I did not stay at Ashby, when once Raymond had gone abroad and Seymour was at Oxford, until the late summer of 1899. Then Lady Ashdown invited me for the coming-of-age celebrations; and I returned from America ten days before my usual time.

After the transformation-scene which was then the normal life of New York, whatever may have happened since, there was little change to observe

at Ashby. The aged retriever still padded at the heels of Lord Ashdown, who still wandered dreamily about the house and gardens in the same tail-coat and bowler hat. Benjy Merton was still the professional entertainer, Doris the self-appointed providence of the house. And James Harborough, no longer in mourning and no longer so fiercely defensive, but still dependent on the Mertons' example and guidance, was still seeking the life and setting that would give him—in the vague phrase which he had unconsciously picked up from Doris—" proper scope ".

On the day of my arrival, as she and I were walking on the terrace, he joined us from the library, where he had been closeted with his host.

" I'm going to make old Ashdown an offer," he announced, jerking his head sideways at the house.

" It'll cost a most awful lot to put in order," said Doris with well-feigned reluctance.

" Oh, well, I daresay it won't ruin me," replied Harborough. " If old Harrison, of Harrison, McCarnock and Whitley, can afford to take Presborough Abbey . . ."

" Oh, you can *afford* it. I was wondering whether you'd get value." Seymour came in sight at the end of the terrace; and Doris, after looking at him, allowed her voice to drop. " Jessie's sure to marry before very long; and, unless she comes to live here, that leaves you with this enormous place on your hands when you're in Liverpool or London half the time."

" But I shan't be doing that always," said

Harborough darkly; and, as though I was too young to understand or to matter, he squeezed her arm.

As Doris was but nineteen, with a butterfly's grace and lightness, it had never occurred to me till this moment that she could dream of marrying a myopic, glisteningly bald man twice her age; and, as she shook free of Harborough's hand, my brief misgiving passed. When we were alone again, I asked her whether Seymour was thinking seriously of marrying Jessie; and she replied with her usual candour that Jessie was one of the greatest heiresses of her time and that the serious thinking was being done for Seymour. Were they in love?, I asked; and Doris told me that she did not know what love had to do with it.

"I was wondering why you took so much trouble . . . ," I began.

"I'd do *anything* for Seymour!," she answered in a tone very different from the one which she had used in asking what love had to do with marriage.

This, definitely, was the first warning I received that Doris and Seymour were drifting into anything more serious than friendship, though I gathered that their hopeless passion had for two years been the common talk, if not the standing jest, of their juniors.

"Romeo and Juliet also ran," I was informed by Raymond, now very much the man-of-the-world since his first cruise in Eastern waters. "Women do play the devil with a fellow, if he gives them half a chance. All the same, it's a bit

thick for old See if he has to marry Jessie when he's madly in love with Doris."

"Bit thick for Jessie, if you come to that," retorted Anita in loyal but inelegant championship of her sex.

"She stinks of money; that's one good thing. But I'd sooner have Doris in the family any day."

It was hardly to be expected that the atmospheric tension caused by Seymour's openly divided allegiance should not be felt by every other member of the party. It so hindered Harborough's negotiations for the lease of Ashby Hall that he and Lord Ashdown sat morning after morning in the library and emerged with no other result than ruffled tempers; it so reacted on Jessie that she lost her nerve and the fruit of two years' training by Doris. The pinchbeck grandeur of the house frightened her; and, instead of putting her at her ease, every one conspired to dazzle her, beginning with Lord Ashdown himself who fetched the plate and heirlooms from the bank and paraded them for the coming-of-age celebrations. When at last it came, the great birthday brought the balm of distraction to tempers that would have erupted without it.

To a fifteen-year-old American, who had hitherto depended on popular fiction for his picture of an address and presentation by the tenantry, a luncheon in marquees on the upper lawn, an affecting breakdown on the part of an aged nurse, and one spasmodic burst of cheering led by a palsied butler, it brought emotional intoxication that passed through every stage from the exalted to the maudlin. They

order this matter, I suspect, better at Hollywood than in England; and no American fifteen-year-old of the present day has an excuse for not knowing how the system of life is maintained in what Hollywood may call "an English baronial castle". When last I was in California, I went at the invitation of Humfrey Barlow to see one of his novels "filmed". I remember his objecting, at one point, to the presence of a spittoon in one of his English domestic sets; I remember the producer's ordering it away, by megaphone; and I remember its being replaced by a palm-tub adorned with *fleurs-de-lys*. The enthusiastic producer, with more truth than he knew, asseverated that Barlow would not happen on a finer cuspidor in the length and breadth of England. At the time I was struck by the contrast between Hollywood's conception of English life and my own experience of it; since then I have come to feel that, while Hollywood might build a more majestic picture, it would miss the underlying tragedy. Lord Ashdown, who could not keep his own roofs in repair, held sway over more acres than the eye could take in; he ruled the souls and bodies of upstanding men, who touched their hats to him, and of decent women, who curtseyed as he passed. Seymour, in rising to return thanks, was no longer the Prometheus of Arkwright's nor the man who had stepped straight into the Oxford eleven, but a territorial princeling of the Middle Ages.

I looked across at Jessie to see whether she was equally impressed. Then and always I felt that

she and I were plants uprooted by the impatient hands of our fathers; even then I was beginning to feel that I was the kind of weed to survive—perhaps to flourish—in any soil. Of Jessie I could not be so sure; even then I suspected that she was wilting for lack of her Lancashire rain and rank soil.

IV

It was not a good speech; and it was very long. I glanced at Lady Ashdown's radiant face and suspiciously bright eyes; at her husband, who was nodding approval with quiet dignity; at Harborough, who was scornful but exhilarated; at Benjy Merton, who considerately murmured "Hear, hear!" whenever Seymour lost his way in a grammatical jungle. Doris had promised to play lawn-tennis with me and I tried to attract her notice; but she was watching Seymour intently and I caught her unawares with an expression of avidity which became hostile as her eyes came to rest on Jessie's passive profile.

When at last the guests were dispersing, I appeared with rackets and balls, but Doris was so tired that she begged to be let off her promise.

"That tent's given me such a headache!," she sighed. "Get the skiff and row me down to the Abbey."

"But we're going there on Thursday for the picnic," I said.

"Are we? Never mind! I want to get away.

It's so hard to talk to people when you've a headache. Take me anywhere!"

I sculled to the ruins and back, speaking once and receiving a nod in return. Doris sat in the stern with the rudder-lines loose in her lap, trailing one hand in the water and staring with troubled brown eyes at nothing. When I helped her out at the landing-stage, I kept her hand and squeezed it. She looked at me with the startled movement of an animal and lifted me half off my feet, pressing me to her and kissing my forehead and eyes. She was crying, silently and convulsively, as I had only seen Irishwomen cry when they bade farewell to steerage passengers at Queenstown.

"My precious child, you've no idea how beastly life can be!," she sobbed; then she added with a gulp, "when you've a headache like mine."

Save on ceremonial occasions, Anita and I—with Raymond under protest—were given an early supper in the morning-room; and I did not see Doris again after our sad parting at the landing-stage. Next day, however, I could not help noticing that Seymour was being steadily policed; if he could not always be marooned on the terrace with Jessie, at least he was never left alone with Doris. At first he seemed vaguely perplexed. After twenty-four hours, he revolted.

It was the morning of the ball; and we were provisioning the skiff, in which he was to row Jessie, for our picnic in the ruins.

"I'm getting a shade tired of that girl," he announced in the cool, controlled voice which I

remembered from his classic contest with Arkwright.

"Seymour, you shouldn't talk like that about one of your guests," Doris reproved him.

"I don't mean anything personal, but one wants a change occasionally. If we went across the fields . . ."

"But your mother thinks she oughtn't to walk in this sun."

"Well, Raymond or Arthur can take her in the boat. You and I . . . If you *can* contrive to mislay the rowlocks . . . ," he added to me.

I saw no more than that Seymour was out of temper and that Doris was trying to pacify him. If I displeased Lord Ashdown, that was a misfortune; but my first loyalty was to Seymour and I let him slip through the garden before I returned to the house with the report that Doris and he had set out on foot. My next action was inspired by pure mischief and by a boy's love of playing with water. Instead of mislaying the rowlocks, I removed a wooden plug from the stern of the skiff and flooded her with three inches of bilge and scum. When the boat-party arrived, I began industriously baling; but we were an hour late in starting and, when we reached the ruins, Seymour and Doris had despaired of our coming and returned to the Hall.

I noticed on Harborough's face a shade of uneasiness, but Jessie was unmoved. For an hour after luncheon we scrambled in and out of the ruins; and once, when we were cut off from the rest on a

jutting slab of the old refectory wall, she asked me whether I was not very sorry to leave America.

"I mean, it's your home," she explained. "Your friends are there."

"I've more friends by now on this side," I answered.

"All my friends are in Liverpool . . . ," she murmured.

Then her father called out impatiently that we must be starting; and it was only when he grabbed the sculls from my inexpert hands that I had time to ponder Jessie's wistful confession. Hitherto I had not concerned myself with the distinctions of English caste. At Lanesborough we had the sons of territorial magnates and country parsons, soldiers and politicians, business-men and barristers. In a republican spirit, which to me was the finest tradition of the school, every one started on the same level; and privilege came only to those who earned it. Had Harborough sent a son there, he would have made his way by his own merits; and it took me some time to realize that the man who had not been to a public school could be patronized by those who had. I suddenly understood Jessie's mood of dejection and her father's occasional outbursts of defensive truculence, when Benjy murmured eternally: "Let me see, who *was* she?", though I did not so readily understand the Ashdowns' willingness to compromise with their dignity for a cash consideration.

It was the first time, too, since my artless question why the young Canfords were embarked on

careers which they could not afford, that I had tried to analyse the ideas represented by such a house as Ashby. The analysis I found forced on me when I contrasted Harborough with Lord Ashdown or Benjy Merton. The one had by his own efforts risen high and was ruthlessly determined to rise higher; he, in the nineteenth century, was what the first John Canford had been in the sixteenth. The others, outliving their vigour and perhaps their utility, hampered by the estates to which they owed their original strength, too rigid to make a new life and too proud to surrender their place, lingered on in resentful decay. To a life of a certain kind, I feel Benjy might have said, he was entitled by birth and upbringing; no change of manners, no redistribution of wealth could alter that. When a man like Harborough challenged him, he tried to frown him out of existence; if that failed, he devised means of despoiling him. As I grew up, in the years between Vereeniging and Serajevo, I saw the Harborough-Ashdown struggle and accommodation repeated a hundred times. By 1914 commerce and industry had won their place in the sun; in 1899, before the death-duties had undermined territorial power, the way of the new-comer was more arduous.

We returned to the Hall to find tea laid on the terrace, though I was surprised that there was no one to serve it. As I went to my room, however, I looked through the window of the library and saw a council in session. Seymour was standing by the fire-place, with one elbow on the mantelpiece, in

the attitude that he adopted for holding a bed of justice at Arkwright's; Lady Ashdown was by her husband's side, straining forward a little to catch what was being said; Doris sat with bent head, looking up from under her lashes at Seymour; and Ashdown lay back in his chair with the tips of his fingers pressed together and a pair of eye-glasses, attached to a broad black ribbon, perched on the end of his nose. As I passed, Benjy Merton, who was staring out of window and paying no attention to anybody, observed:

"The others are back."

When I had washed my hands, I strolled downstairs and caught sight of Doris and Seymour with their heads close together, whispering by the door into the garden.

"I must tell Arthur first," I heard her say; and I wondered what I was to be told.

"Yes, tell him," Seymour agreed. "He's really responsible."

And then I guessed what I was to be told.

They had not seen me; and I crept upstairs again past my own room, on and on, too blind to notice where I was going until I found myself in the first of a derelict row of garrets. Cobwebs hung in curtains and festoons from the ceiling; the floor was honeycombed with rat-holes; and I crashed forward through top-heavy mountains of legless chairs and pictureless frames, repeating with dry sobs: "She's mine, mine, mine!" to a world of imaginary Seymours. Far below in the garden some one called my name. I dragged myself to

the door, but I was still crying; and, though I was steadier when the search was renewed half an hour later, I had only to meet Doris in order to break down afresh. . . . Long shadows climbed up the walls; a rosy glow hinted at a sunset which I could not see; and the reverberation of a gong told me that every one would now be coming up to dress. If I had left the garret door open . . . If they dug me out like a dying rat . . .

I crawled farther behind the piled wreckage of musty furniture and waited for the second gong. The house was dark and silent when I tiptoed to my room and stole into bed. I was pulling the sheets over my head, when a voice whispered:

"Arthur! Don't be frightened! It's me: Doris."

Light fingers were touching their way over the blankets; and I heard quick breathing. A scent of rose-water drifted, bitter-sweet, through the darkness; and then two hands brushed my cheeks, pinioned my arms and drew me forward until my head was lying against a cool, bare shoulder.

"If I'd thought you'd mind like this . . . Arthur, if I tell you that I'm going to be wonderfully happy . . ."

"But *I* want you!," I broke in.

She gave me a curious little laugh; and, when she spoke, her voice was trembling:

"I'm not worth it, Arthur; and some day you'll find that out. Won't you wish me luck? I may need it more than you think."

Her arms loosened their hold on my shoulders.

I heard the scrape of a match; and in another moment we were blinking in the yellow light of a candle that sent fantastic shadows leaping up the walls and across the ceiling. Doris stood over me, smiling and composed; but her bosom was rising and falling, her face was white as her arms and neck.

"I don't want you to marry Seymour," I growled.

"But if I'm very fond of him? It's a great match. I'm nobody, Arthur; I've no money . . ."

"Nor has he. How are you going to live?"

I heard the curious little laugh for the second time; but there was no laughter in her big, anguished eyes.

"By my wits, I suppose . . . If you know what that means. I always *have*. . . . Arthur, *every one's* against it, the one little bit of romance I shall ever have! But we stuck it out. I ought to be there for the announcement . . ."

Her eyes wandered in search of watch or clock and came to rest again on my face. I am afraid I took Doris for granted. Not until I had had experience of other women did I realize how few would have troubled themselves over the calf-love of a school-boy. That was ever the mysterious, disarming component in Doris Merton; and, if I have had to pay a long price for enjoying it, I have not yet been able to pay in full.

"All right, Doris. I hope . . . ," I began.

And then there was an abominable choke which I could not control. She sat down on the bed and ran her fingers through my hair.

"Little grub! You were too miserable to wash. Well . . . *I'm* not *always* as happy as I seem. Poor old Arthur . . . And, if it hadn't been for you to-day, we shouldn't be engaged now." I tried to speak and could not. My silence must have been more eloquent than the wildest of my words or the unmanliest of my tears. Doris looked at me in a way that I shall never forget, though I find it hard to describe. So a Lothario, announcing his engagement, might have been racked by untimely conscience at sight of a girl he had betrayed. "Darling, I don't *really* mean all that to you! I do? . . . Well . . . Well, Arthur . . . Arthur, if you tell me that it makes you miserable to think of me married to Seymour, I won't marry him. Is that good enough for you?"

I looked at her in astonishment, for she was ready to keep her word. Then there was a creak on the boards outside; and Seymour called her name.

"My father was wondering . . . ," he began, as she opened the door.

There was a pause; and I could see Doris shaking her head.

"He's had some bad news," she whispered. "It's . . . all *right*, but he didn't want to meet a lot of people. Seymour, can't you get them to go in without me?"

"But it's the . . . night of nights!," Seymour answered in loud amazement.

She whispered something that I could not hear; and the whisper ended in the same unreal laugh.

Seymour's proximity had rallied me more than all the tenderness of Doris. When she closed the door and came back to my bed, I could congratulate her with a steady voice. It was nine o'clock before she went downstairs; and the Ashdowns were furious at her lateness. Yet, as Seymour said, it was the "night of nights" and should have been her hour of triumph; she could have found little amusement in talking to an infatuated child. That, I am afraid, the Ashdowns did not seem to understand; but there are many things that they failed to understand.

By the morning I was perhaps the most collected member of the house-party. The others separated into earnestly whispering couples, coalescing to exchange conclusions and separating again to whisper anew. The army, murmured Raymond, would have to be sacrificed; I repeated the murmur to Nita, who murmured back that Seymour might have to leave Magdalen and set about earning his livelihood at once. We must not, Lady Ashdown enjoined under her breath, say anything to any one at present: See would not be marrying for a long time. What, every one demanded, coalescing into a common session, did "a long time" mean?

That the fathers of the principals were engaged in similar discussions I judged from the fragments which reached me.

"You'll find that something will come along," said Benjy Merton soothingly, as he and Ashdown paced the lawn in front of the house. "And Doris is all there, you know. She'll help him a lot."

"But how?," demanded Ashdown; and Benjy, pink, plump, curly and vague, had no answer for his grey, harassed companion.

Had he emulated his daughter's frankness, he might have replied with truth that Doris knew far better than Seymour how to use a title. If she could not marry money, she would attract it; and Seymour, left to himself, would have done neither.

"They've both of them plenty of rich friends," Benjy murmured hopefully next time they came within earshot.

Lord Ashdown looked up in physical pain at the vast, dilapidated house with the curtain of ivy flapping dissolutely against the thin red-brown bricks. Harborough had announced overnight that Ashby Hall was in too great disrepair for him to think of taking it. As a formal precaution, the entail had been broken; but for the first time in twenty-one years Lord Ashdown seemed to realize that perhaps, after all, he and Seymour would have to sell Ashby. It was abdication; on the morrow of the coming-of-age celebrations it was disgrace. The unburied dead were raising a mortgage on their vault.

"People attach too much importance to money nowadays," Benjy grunted, as they paused and turned in their quarter-deck march.

"You agree that there must be no question of their marrying *yet*?," asked Ashdown a moment later.

"I should leave that to them."

"They must have *something* to live on."

"I should leave that to Doris," said Benjy, as, tiring of his walk, he turned in through the open library window.

Lady Ashdown was distressed, after the manner of women, at the abrupt change of plans; Nita and Raymond were conventionally excited by an engagement in the family, though Nita confided to me that she did not know how Seymour *dared* defy his father. Harborough, looking on Doris as a girl whom he had befriended and who had repaid his kindness by jilting him and stealing Jessie's birthright, would have left that day, if he had not dreaded the obvious construction that would be put on his flight. By staying, he played into the hands of Doris, who set herself to make friends with Jessie. Before I returned to Lanesborough, the Mertons had been invited to stay with outraged father and despoiled daughter at their place in Cheshire. Realizing reluctantly that a woman who could pull strings so adroitly for herself might be engaged to pull them for others, Harborough handed back to Doris her own criticism that Jessie wanted a woman friend who would shew her the ropes, so to say.

"She lacks *scope*," he explained.

My first letter of the term—dear Doris never omitted to send me at least one walnut-cake a month until I got into the Sixth—was dated from Runcorn and enclosed an invitation from Mr. Harborough for the Easter holidays. Doris laid the credit of her engagement at my door, and mentioned that Seymour was abandoning Oxford

for some position in the City which Mr. Harborough had found for him.

"*We shall live in London, when we're married,*" she concluded. "*That is, if all my plans come off. I feel inclined to say, like Rastignac apostrophizing Paris:* 'A nous deux'."

CHAPTER THREE

The Gold-Rush

"What a city to sack!"

Saying attributed to Blücher during his ride through London in 1814.

I

I HAVE been trying for the last week, at a distance of four thousand miles and more than a quarter of a century, to recreate the stage and scenery which I found on visiting England for the first time in the year of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee.

I doubt if I shall succeed. All those years ago my father asked me to describe the country of my adoption; and I did not succeed then. For a month I was bewildered. After a month I took everything for granted. And I can add now but little to what I told my father on returning to America after a year at Lanesborough: the country was astonishingly rich and it seemed to have been there for ever, though wealth was strangely ill-distributed.

My father smiled mysteriously. When he left England, the shock of the Crimean war and the Indian mutiny was being slowly absorbed; the queen was a young woman; the new statesmanship

of Mr. Gladstone was being held back until Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell were out of the way. Now, though Mr. Gladstone was dying and the queen was old, they had taken on such immortality in the popular imagination that a boy might be excused for thinking the conditions which they represented were unchanging. That the balance of political power had shifted or that classes were being shuffled I hardly began to discover until Victorianism and the nineteenth century tottered and collapsed in the South African war. Then, to use terms of a later epoch, the accommodation between democracy and tradition, between the new rich and the new poor of those days, became the literary interest and the social study of the dawning twentieth century.

The problem was compressed into a tabloid by the cunning fingers of Doris Merton, who discovered in London a city that existed primarily to sack and a people that required (whether they knew it or not; whether they liked it or not) to be entertained. The ship-owner or iron-master of social ambition was her natural prey; and the ship-owner or iron-master without ambition was quickly inspired if Doris thought him worth while. In a curious mood of polite collectivism, hating that money should lie at the bank when it could be spent on bread and circuses, she brought the provinces to London, the world to England; beginning with Mr. Harborough, of Liverpool, she continued with Mr. Nordau, of Pretoria, and was wrestling with Mr. Leadbitter of Pittsburgh when the war tumbled her world in

ruins. Though Harborough was the earliest of her victims, there was from first to last little change in her methods and results; and, if I select him from a big field, it is only because I watched his metamorphosis from the day when the treatment began.

"Harborough's a kind old soul, but he wants smartening up," Doris confided, as we drove in a mournful and exhausted fly from the station to Bridge End.

I had arrived, mildly wondering, for the party which she was giving for her friends in another man's house with another man's money; and her air of ruthless energy reminded me of an Ashby housemaid, with sleeves rolled up and handkerchief on head, spring-cleaning the very lives of the people on whom she had imposed herself.

"Well, you're the person to do that," I said, remembering her transformation of Jessie.

"Yes, but you'll have to take things as you find them for the present. The next time you come . . . Father's overhauling the cellar and knocking the men into shape; but dinner's at seven, you wash in the bathroom and nobody dresses. I haven't been in charge long enough to make much impression . . ."

"I think it's marvellous that we're here at all," I confessed.

"Well, Harborough knows I ought to be able to marry off Jessie; and we can be very useful to him in London. *He'll* be useful to *us*, too . . ."

Early training had taught Doris that the poor had always something to sell, the rich always some-

thing to pay. After that, it was the business of an efficient broker, who had priced every friend on her index, to fix a commission for bringing buyer and seller together. For Harborough she had already sketched a five years' campaign which was to carry him from the discreet beginnings of a baronetcy, through loyal party-service, open house in London and well-advertised charity, to a peerage, a second marriage and the foundation of a family.

"It's bully for *him* . . . ," I began.

Doris would not let me finish my diffident objection.

"I've not spent my life in other people's houses," she retorted, "without finding that every one wants something he can't afford. If you can bring people together . . ."

While she catalogued the needs and values of her friends, I tried to understand the ambition of a man like Harborough, who differed from the business-men I had met with my father in that business was now for him only a stepping-stone to social eminence. I have sometimes wondered whether in early, sensitive youth Harborough had been unforgettably snubbed or whether he was envious of the deference paid to birth compared with the grudging reception conceded to achievement. Certainly I have met no one so grimly set on success and few of whom success could be more surely predicted. Even to the unimaginative eyes of a boy, Harborough was forceful; he was determined; and he was patient. From his rather boastful way of talking, though he atoned for it in the eyes of the

Ashdowns by making good his boasts and impressed them—as he had impressed Anita—by sheer efficiency, I judged that he might also be brutal, remorseless and vindictive.

Even in those early days I am not sure that, when I saw Doris apparently twisting him round her finger, I did not feel that he was allowing himself to be twisted for his ends more than for hers. To Doris, who saw him chiefly at seasons when his efficiency broke up against hers, he was always some one to be managed.

"Have you decided when you're going to be married?," I asked her.

"As soon as I've shewn Mr. Harborough that our interests *are* really his. You see," she continued in explanation of her index principle, "*I* ought to have married a rich man who wanted to be dragged into decent society; some one like *him*, in fact. And Seymour ought to have married the first heiress who came along. They wouldn't have been happy, but both would have got what they needed. As I couldn't spare Seymour, I must get Mr. Harborough and Jessie what they want by other ways; and then he'll see that he can't exist without us. The first thing, of course, is to smarten them up. When next you come here . . ."

As Doris continued at short intervals to speak of a second visit to Bridge End, I must record that I returned in my next holidays, for no better reason that I have been able to discover in twenty-five years than that she wished to have my approval of her handiwork. Only four months had elapsed;

but I was now met at the station by an empty brougham, Jessie Harborough was presiding over tea in a corner of the drawing-room, a subdued footman whispered a request for my keys and at eight o'clock Harborough, concealing with almost complete success his hankering after a seven-o'clock dinner, said :

" Well, I suppose we ought to be dressing ! Has Jessie told you which your room is ? I usually drink a glass of sherry about this time . . ."

" Quite safe to take it," whispered Benjy, who had been securely moored to the house since Christmas.

And an excellent hot bath had been prepared ; my clothes were laid out ; the servants treated dinner as a sacrament rather than a free fight ; and Harborough no longer tucked the corner of his napkin inside his collar.

I congratulated Doris.

" Wait till I've brought him to London !," she answered, taking in, with an inspecting general's glance, the table, the room, the demeanour of the servants and the manners of our host. " And I'll land him with Ashby yet ! "

On this second visit I found Harborough being taught the word " inaccessibility."

" Somehow in this place . . . ," he grumbled to me, with a sour glance at Jessie, who waited, patient and aloof, as on the *Caucasia* and at Ashby, for whatever this contest of giants might bring her. " You always say she could have a great success in London, Doris." . . .

"She would learn to hold her own there," suggested Doris, as though Jessie had not been present.

"Why she can't . . . All dam' nonsense! *I* hold *my* own! Anyway, no one shall say she didn't have a fair chance. You'll arrange this?"

A fortnight later, the train that bore me back to school carried Jessie, Doris and, of course, Benjy on a three months' round of visits.

"That gal of mine really is rather wonderful," said Benjy with a degree of impersonality which I, a connoisseur of parental detachment, was constrained to admire. "Share her butt; and you'll find where the birds are coming thickest. Dine on the night she's been invited; and you'll be given the best champagne. If a revolution breaks out here, enquire which side Doris is supporting."

And, if not a revolution, a war for the possession of London was in train at this moment. Of the march on the capital—with Doris bearing the standard, Benjy calling for cups of sack by the way and the Ashdowns pressed into lending respectability to a marauding party—I heard later from friends who told me that by the summer of 1900 a curious section of society was waiting to renew acquaintance with the best-advertised heiress of the year. Had Doris sprung her friends on an unprepared London, they might have whistled for guests after the first two or three parties had sated the psychologically inquisitive and the professionally hungry. From cautious Scotland, however, word was brought that, on the guarantee of the Mertons, one was safe in knowing the Harboroughs; from

practical Yorkshire it was reported that the money was "all right"; the impressionable Midlands added that a house was being taken in Portman Square; and the tolerant home-counties voted that James Harborough was not so bad as some people made out.

As I shall never be obliged to write or think of Jessie again, I may give a few lines to saying that she was presented in the summer of 1901, that she became engaged to George Fenimore in her first season, that she married him that autumn and retired to the West of Ireland, where I presume she is still living.

"All work executed with promptness and civility," boasted Doris; "satisfaction guaranteed. . . . I seem to get what I want, don't I, Arthur?"

I was staying a night at Ashby on my way back from New York.

"Fenimore is only an Irish peer," said Benjy, looking up from his study of *Debrett*.

"*She'll* never know the difference," Doris answered with scorn.

II

In King Edward's first list of birthday honours Harborough's name appeared among the baronets; but for his generosity, I read, the Imperial School of Tropical Medicine would not have been established. At the same time Seymour cut short his career at Magdalen to accept a directorship in a West Indian produce company; and, as I settled down to my last year at Lanesborough, the arrange-

ments for a marriage which the high contracting parties attributed ultimately to me were published in the press. Doris had, once more, got what she wanted.

I have felt, on many occasions since, that Doris allowed her outlook to be distorted by the lessons which she learned at this time. Success came too easily. In less than a year she had attracted one man, cajoled another and fooled a third. She had discovered the fatal facility of making matches and securing appointments. And she had substantiated her own disastrous belief that, while England was full of buyers and sellers, there were not enough brokers for the work of bringing them together. Fancying that every one would surrender to a smile or a caress, she never realized that she could not hope to shake a man like Lord Ashdown in essentials; and she might have found James Harborough more formidable if she had suspended her sex-appeal and listened in a corner of some smoking-room when he was boasting how he had broken a firemen's strike or humbled a rival or waited ten years to revenge himself on an enemy. Yes, to succeed superficially was all too easy in these days.

And, when I helped her to send out the wedding invitations, Doris was finding it no less fatally easy to equip herself at the expense of her friends. When a victim was shy, she accompanied the formal summons with an affectionate personal note; if there was no reply, a second invitation was sent; when everything else failed, Doris organized exhibi-

tions of presents in her still unfurnished house and dragged in the defaulter by force.

I attended the first of these "hold-ups", as we should call them now, and felt rather as if the leaders of an invading army had invited me to their camp and were shewing me their booty. The house in Hill Street was surrendered by Harborough on the morrow of his baronetcy; and I found Benjy industriously digging himself in, engraving the new address on his cards and publishing his name in the telephone directory with the Canford's new number against it. One floor had been set aside for the Ashdowns when they came to London; there were cupboard-bedrooms for Anita and Raymond; and Doris insisted that I must put up in Hill Street whenever I wanted a lodging for the night.

"I told you they had both of them plenty of rich friends, Ashdown," Benjy chuckled, as we drifted from the cellar filled by a diamond magnate to the stables equipped by a dubious financier with a brougham and pair.

"Marriage *is* worth while," Doris sighed happily, returning to the hall, where new parcels were being delivered more quickly than they could be unpacked.

The only dissentient was Lady Ashdown, who strayed from table to table, fingering the jewellery and turning over the furs in bewilderment.

"*One* maid, by herself . . . ," she murmured. I noticed that everything in this perplexed little lady's existence was reckoned in terms of servants

and their wages. "A butler and two footmen couldn't keep all that plate clean . . ."

"*She'll* never go short," said Benjy. "What I say is: begin as you mean to go on: that's what I say. People *like* giving Doris things."

"'People', as you call them, can't pay her weekly books," retorted Lady Ashdown.

And yet even the daily need of ready money, so oppressive on the greater part of mankind, was a need that, in some agreeable way, Doris felt no more than a fleshy man of good circulation feels the cold that vexes his fellows in our bleak northern latitudes. At first, with the cheques that were sandwiched between the other presents, ready money was lying about, like the champagne after the wedding, mutely inviting every one to help himself; and, though Doris, with the æsthetic petulance of the extravagant poor, gave away anything that she did not like and squandered on showy fripperies the sums which poor Lady Ashdown had earmarked for uninteresting pots and pans, the threat of weekly books could not materialize until after the honeymoon. From time to time, indeed, Seymour was invoked to restrain Doris; but the grave statesman whom I had venerated at Lanesborough was gone for ever. Perhaps, in our first encounter, he was a hero created by schoolboys, a "man's man" and a woman's plaything. Maybe, as Doris hinted once in later years, he and his family were so debilitated by inbreeding that manners masqueraded as character and their loyalty to codes and conventions hid an essentially timid spirit. Certainly he failed

to control her; and, though I shall have to refer many times to Seymour in the course of this narrative, I doubt if I shall ever again refer to him as a man who mattered.

I returned to school before the wedding took place, but Doris sent me a full description from Venice.

"*. . . An awful thing happened at the end,*" she wrote. "*Jim Gregory was best man; and, when he gave us our tickets at the station, he said 'You've got money and everything?' My dear, we hadn't more than a pound between us! Fortunately Mr. Gregory could lend us ten; and we only had our meals to pay for till we got to Danieli's. Then God was really good to us. We met an American who simply froze on to Seymour and me, as soon as he saw the name on my dressing-case. We've left the hotel, as you see, and are staying with him in an enormous palace. I'm trying to get him to come back and take a house in London; I'm sure he'd find it more amusing. But I think he was mixed up in rather a bad scandal.*" . . .

In this way Doris, only daughter of Benjamin Merton, one time captain in the King's Own Border Regiment, and Seymour, Viscount Canford, embarked on matrimony. "Begin as you mean to go on," Benjy had said; and I remember this letter because it shewed me that she was going on, as she had begun, without a money-sense.

For two years or so after the marriage, I saw little of Doris and her incongruous relations. First at Lanesborough, then at Oxford, I was making new friends; and, while she was surrounding herself

with people who would be useful to her in return for a dinner at which they could meet the stately Lord Ashdown, she could not want to be bothered with me. Lord Ashdown, too, shedding his prejudice against commerce when the aproned shopkeeper was replaced by the frock-coated director of a limited liability company, had by now suffered his name to be printed on the prospectus of enterprises launched by his daughter-in-law's friends; and Ashby was only in commission between board-meetings.

Looking back on my last years at school and the whole of my time at the university, I can recall nothing that contributed to my later destiny; and, to borrow Humfrey Barlow's phrase for the last time, it was only when I left Oxford for London that I returned to the road which bore me ultimately to Saint Helena.

"Well, I suppose, you're going to settle here," Doris began, when I obeyed her summons to have my life discussed and, presumably, arranged by her. "People say I've lowered the tone of London society, for some reason," she added at a tangent.

"You've raised the standard of comfort," I said.

"Yes, I've made it a very jolly place to live in. Do you prefer chambers or a flat?"

"I must see first if America wants me any more than she did ten years ago," I said.

"It's much greater fun here," said Doris. "In America, people are always disapproving of something. It's *so* provincial." Detaching herself from the rest of her party, she led me through the house.

" It *has* been a risk and a half ! We hadn't a *penny* ; and I was shouldering the entire family, though the Ashdowns were barely civil until I brought baby John into the world. Now, when I've arranged things for Nita . . . She's a jewel to look at ; and she's going to make the match of the century, when I've finished her education. Tell me you admire my taste ! *I* think the house is enchanting."

" So do I."

" And I go so well with it !," she laughed, posing herself for a moment against the black-and-gold wall of her Chinese drawing-room and then breaking into an unexpected step-dance of triumph.

Doris must have been about six-and-twenty at this time, but I vow that she did not look a day older than when we crossed together on the *Caucasia* nine years before. Her eye was as bright and her complexion as clear as I had ever known them. I believe that she was temperate in what she ate and drank ; and I suspect that she was divinely endowed with a faculty of not caring deeply about anything.

" I think you're marvellous," I said. " But don't you grow tired of this eternal racket and all these people ? "

" They *are* an odd lot," she agreed, with an appraising eye on her crowded drawing-room. " They're useful, though. It's one thing to keep afloat, but I have to look ahead. Something must be done about Ashby."

If Seymour's directorships paid for the household in Hill Street, I felt that, with such new friends as

I was meeting that night, Doris ought not to need many years for building up her capital.

"Wouldn't you prefer to lead a life of your own," I urged, "instead of keeping an hotel?"

"An alms-house," she substituted. "We're not *making* money. I've had twenty-four thousand pounds through my hands in seven months, but we've exactly forty-three pounds in the world at present. Four years . . ."

I thought of Benjy's counsel, delivered in that room on the eve of the wedding. The road which Doris and Seymour had chosen was broad, even if it was not easy; it was shining with lights and fragrant with strewn flowers. Unfortunately it did not seem to lead anywhere; and I felt that she must come to the end of her rich friends some day.

III

It did not occur to me at this time that I was being added to their list, but I now know that my name was placed on her card-index at the moment when she discovered that I was the only son of Arthur Weston, president of the Ribling Corporation. Having once allowed for my father's whim in educating me abroad, I accepted the circumstances of my life without question; but the enquiring brain of Doris Canford would not rest until she had ascertained why and how this unexplained American boy was sent to an English public school and university. I believe it was Harborough who told her about my father; and I am amused to think

that she probably knew more of him and of my expectations than I did. All that I realized, in the six weeks between my coming down from Oxford and returning to America, was that Doris was introducing me to a succession of girls who were all "sweetly pretty", all "poor as a church-mouse" and all "dying to meet" me. As I had no wish to marry, I suggested that she should lend her helping hand to Chris Young, whose fidelity to me—in a world that wanted him as little now as at our first meeting—was embarrassing. In an overcrowded house it was Chris who received a shake-down in some one else's dressing-room; if a dance had to be cut, it was Chris who was left partnerless; I had come to look on him as the eternal fifth who patiently read an evening paper while others played bridge; and always he turned to me as his first and best friend.

"He doesn't sound promising," said Doris doubtfully.

"I believe his people are quite well-off."

"Oh, I know that," she admitted unguardedly. "I think, though, that you'll suit the girl I have in mind better."

"Perhaps, when I come back from America . . . ," I temporized.

"You'll leave it too late one of these days. Chris Young is stealing a march on you. Her brother's up at Caius, so I made him invite her up for May Week and arranged that she should meet Chris."

"Well, I don't want to queer his pitch, even if I could."

" I believe you're in love with some one else the whole time," said Doris impatiently.

I was forgetting Chris Young, who broke the habit of years by not inviting me to dine alone with him on the eve of the Oxford and Cambridge match, when I received an intriguing letter dated from a house on Southampton Water.

" . . . *I am staying here,*" Chris wrote, " *with some people of the name of Palmer (Willie Palmer is at Caius with me. Elise was up for May Week, so that's how I came to know them). If you're not absolutely booked up, they'd be most awfully glad to see you ; a week-end, or longer if you can manage it. I've talked about you till they must be absolutely sick of your name ; and I fancy they've heard of you through Lady Canford. That is by the way, however. What* I *want is for you to meet Elise . . .*"

I had a week before my boat sailed ; and I wrote to say that I should be delighted to spend part of it with the Palmers. If I had doubted the purpose of my invitation, it was made clear when Chris rushed past a solemn, badged guard and a group of tentatively communistic porters to board my train at Winchester. He had come from Southampton, bare-headed, sun-burnt, in flannel trousers and a Falcon blazer, to prepare me for his lady's charms ; and, when I observed the new steadiness in his eyes and voice, I realized that he had at last found his place in the uncaring void.

" Congratulate me !," he cried.

" With all my heart !," I said, though I wanted rather to congratulate Miss Palmer on making a man

of Chris. "You old dog! How long has this been going on?"

"She came up for May Week; and we were engaged before she went back."

"Quick work," I commented.

"I believe it was fate," Chris replied with immense seriousness. "I wasn't going to the Falcon ball, but one of Willie Palmer's men failed him. I shouldn't have had a single dance with Elise if another man hadn't been late. Then if there hadn't been the father and mother of a row . . . It looks like fate, doesn't it?"

As I collected the disjointed fragments of history, I felt that it was superfluous to drag in destiny. Miss Palmer, it seemed, had punished her dilatory partner by transferring half her programme to Chris; and the defaulter had aggravated his offence by retiring impenitently to a cloak-room with a roulette-board. Hither he was followed by so many others of the party that Miss Palmer perforce transferred to Chris most of the remaining half of her programme.

"*I* was in clover," he added, "but Elise was *furious* . . . quite rightly. Talked of leaving Cambridge that night. By Jove, I didn't envy the others, if she'd told them what she thought of them."

Apparently they gave her no chance; and by the second night the party was riven. Until the defaulters apologized, Miss Palmer would have nothing to do with them; and it was only when they demonstrated how contentedly they could

live without her that she converted a threatened stalemate into a victory by becoming engaged to Chris.

"And her people?," I asked. As described by Chris, the engagement seemed to be based more on pique than on love. "You won't be marrying yet awhile, I suppose?"

"No, the Palmers don't want us to say we're engaged till my father comes on leave. The old man's been an absolute topper, though. Pleased as Punch. Invited me down here. Gave me his blessing. Here we are at last! Is this all your luggage? I don't want to waste time."

A pony-cart bore us from the station to a small, unimpressive stone house on the east side of Southampton Water. Mr. Palmer, I was given to understand, controlled some business which took him to America once or twice a year; but there was so little evidence of prosperity that I wondered how far Chris had been made welcome on the recommendation of Doris Canford. Her "sweetly pretty" friends were so often "as poor as church mice" that I could hardly think of beauty without tacking distress on to it or of distress without looking for a rescuer. Of Elise Palmer's beauty there was no question. I can best describe its effect on me by saying that, when I first saw her grey-green eyes and Greek profile, I was pettily jealous of Chris and felt that, though I had no thoughts of falling in love with her, I should have liked her to fall in love with me. From my later knowledge, I should expect to hear that she has coarsened in manner, though I

doubt not that in appearance she is as daintily exquisite as ever; but, whatever she may be after all these years, I know that I should be uneasy if I heard she was coming to this island-retreat. Now, as then, she would be able to take good care of herself; now, as then, I am not sure that I should be proof against an appeal which I know to be meretricious.

"We've heard so much of you from Chris," said Mrs. Palmer. "Well, I suppose these young people have told you their news?"

As I shook hands, I wondered whether I had detected a note of detachment in her weary voice, as though she was dissociating herself from whatever the "young people" might arrange.

"Glad you were able to come," said Mr. Palmer. "I was asking Chris if you were related to Arthur Weston of the Ribling Steel Corporation. A son? Very interesting . . . My dear, I don't know whether you've heard of the Ribling Steel Corporation," he continued to his wife. "If not . . . Correct me, if I'm wrong, Weston: it's next in size to the United States Steel, isn't it?"

Throughout tea I was explained by Mr. Palmer to his wife and daughter in the way that I have heard my country-women explaining their guests to one another under cover of an introduction. Since that day there have been many occasions on which I have seen people unbending to me when they realized that I was heir to a rich father, but I can have been little more than two-and-twenty when I learned my lesson and the world changed

its colour. When Mr. Palmer dismissed some one as a man whom "your father, my dear Weston, could buy up half a dozen times over without noticing it", I caught Elise looking at me with new interest in her grey-green eyes.

Was this, I wondered in sudden fury, why my father had kept me in ignorance so long? He should have known that his secret was not his own. Henceforth I should have to analyse every smile and handshake to see how much was due to me, how much to my father's money. At our first meeting half-an-hour before Elise had murmured rather crossly: "So here's the friend we've heard so much about." . . .

At dinner, though I sat next to her, I talked chiefly to Mrs. Palmer; and, when at the end she proposed a walk in the garden, I replied that her father had suggested bridge. From the sun-dial, confided Elise, it was possible to see the lights of Southampton; and, when I enquired why any one who had once seen the lights of Southampton should wish to see them again, she disarmed me by confessing that she wanted to hear my private opinion of the engagement and to be assured that I thought her worthy of Chris.

"I've already congratulated him," I told her. "I can congratulate you every bit as much. He and I are very old friends now . . ."

"What did he say about me?," she interrupted with an eagerness which she reserved for the not infrequent moments when the conversation centred upon herself.

"It was only a sketch, from Winchester to Southampton," I said.

"You shall fill it in now that we've met!," she insisted, dragging me through an open window. "Did he do me justice? Did he, . . . Arthur?"

IV

I FOUND myself looking out over quicksilver waves at the winking lights of an incoming steamer. There was no moon, but the stars were shining from a cloudless sky. I observed that Elise had given a quarter-turn of her head before deciding that, with a broad white fillet round her hair, she stood to gain in profile.

"I've been so frightened ever since Chris asked to have you invited!," she whispered. "He thinks the world of you. I hope you don't regret coming?"

"It was most kind of your people to ask me. Chris is my oldest friend . . ."

"I know." She raised her eyes to mine. "I heard you congratulating him *so* sweetly."

"So *sincerely*," I amended.

"*Were* you sincere? I felt you were saying 'Rather you than me, my boy'."

To a speech of this kind I never have had, I never shall have, an adequate answer.

"I was startled," I said. "Everything seems to have happened all in a moment. Chris calls it fate . . ."

"I wonder." Elise let fall her cloak and waited for me to pick it up. "If Willie'd been at Oxford

and I'd come up for Commem. or whatever you call it . . ."

Women not infrequently take a holiday from discretion on the day that they become engaged; and, as Elise spread her cloak over a stone seat, I felt that she was inviting me to share her holiday.

"You would have lighted such a candle that day . . . ," I answered readily enough. Then it occurred to me that I should seem rather an ass when Elise, with a woman's vanity, told Chris that I had made instant love to her. "I'm sorry, I oughtn't to have said that even in joke."

"How solemn you've become all of a sudden!," she mocked.

"Well, Chris is my friend," I said. "You're engaged to him . . ."

"Father says I'm not to consider myself engaged till I'm twenty-one," she interposed swiftly.

"*That* doesn't make any difference!," I exclaimed.

"Not to you?"

And then I made the very disconcerting discovery that this girl was more in earnest than I had thought.

"How can it?," I asked.

With a movement too quick for me to observe, she turned the whole of her body to me, bending forward from the waist with her hands clasped behind her back, raising herself on tip-toe till her lips, demurely smiling, were on a level with mine and within an inch of them.

"How can it . . . indeed?," she whispered with provocative melancholy. Then her lips touched

mine as lightly as a butterfly's wing. "I . . . *wonder*!," she laughed, as she sprang back and walked rapidly towards the house.

When I entered the drawing-room Elise was waving good-night to the party at the bridge-table. It was half-past ten; and I had been given four hours to diagnose her relations with Chris. I did not minimize my own responsibility: I had done little to check her from the moment when she piqued my vanity by warming to an oblique interest in me as the son of my father, but we were of an age and of a generation when the code of permissible philandering was better defined than nowadays. I felt that, if Elise wanted to while away an hour in flirtation, she ought to have stopped short of kissing: if she wanted to kiss, she ought to have stopped short of kissing me on the lips; if she wanted to kiss me on the lips, she ought to have stopped short of it while we were almost in sight of Chris Young and the bridge-table. She ought not to have quoted her father as saying that she was not to consider herself engaged. . . .

Mrs. Palmer was bidding me good-night; and I stared stupidly at her before jumping to my feet.

"You boys care for a drink?," her husband enquired hospitably, foraging at a side-table. "*I'm* going to get into a short coat. Advise you to do the same, Weston."

I did not mind what coat I wore; but Willie Palmer had already gone out of the room and I did not want to be left alone with Chris, who would inevitably ask me again what I thought of Elise.

I felt my way along a darkened passage and changed into a smoking-jacket. On my way back a door opened and threw a bar of yellow light across the passage. A voice whispered "Arthur"; and I, invisible in the dark, saw a bare arm resting against the door and half a Greek profile against a background of blue wall-paper. I hesitated and in my moment of indecision heard Mr. Palmer saying:

"Here! Don't knock yourself! What they want to turn out all the lights for . . ."

I have no idea how long we sat up. I was looking all the while at Chris and wondering what he would think if Elise, now or later, told him light-heartedly that she had made a mistake.

When I awoke next day, the girl was standing by my bedside in skirt and blouse.

"You wouldn't like to come for a walk?," she asked.

Had I been on fire to prosecute this unwanted romance, I wished to be left alone until I had breakfasted.

"Miss Palmer . . . ," I began in a tone of subdued determination; but Elise had vanished.

Perhaps, if I had remained in my room, she would have thought twice before paying me a second visit. The privacy of the bedroom was more widely accepted twenty years ago than now; and I fancy that even the easy-going Palmers would have remonstrated if their indulged daughter had been found swinging her feet from the end of my bed. I got up partly from fear of what Elise would do next if I disobeyed her, partly from determination

that this nonsense must be stopped forthwith. Now that I am a good deal older, I believe that more than half the determined acts which cause a man to be considered "strong" are the direct result of ill-temper.

"Dear lady, your tactics are crude," I murmured to myself as I entered the rose-garden.

And yet I am not at all sure that the meeting was ill-staged. In the last twenty years or so I have had every opportunity for forgetting Elise Palmer as she stood in white-buckskin shoes and silk stockings, a pleated white skirt and low-cut blouse, bare-headed with a broad ribbon to keep her rippling black hair in place. Her cheeks were still flushed with sleep; and her eyes were soft and dark. She was arranging roses on a stone table by the sun-dial; and her hands were cool and wet with dew. I seem to have forgotten very little about it.

"You can see right into Southampton Water from that gap in the hedge," she told me. "Whenever daddy goes to America, we all stand there and wave good-bye."

"You can wave good-bye to me next Saturday," I said.

"I wish you weren't going. . . . But we've still three days," she answered.

"Yes. Those three days are the difficulty," I said, as we walked towards the beach. "I don't know what to say to Chris."

Her hand touched mine for a moment and then dropped to her side.

"Why not tell him the truth?"

"Which is?"

"That you're in love with me," she whispered. "Or that you kissed me?"

The words may have been more brutal than I had intended; their effect was more devastating than I had thought possible. Elise turned on me with a burst of fury that obliterated the daintiness and innocent mischief of her flirtation overnight. Had she known me for "the mean skunk" I was, she would never have "larked about" with me. It was all my "beastly fault" and I should look "a nice sort of fool" when Chris heard the whole story. "*The man who kisses a pretty girl and goes and tells his mother*," she hummed to herself. As I turned away, she pursued me with the scolding refrain:

"Ought to have his lips cut off,
Ought to have his lips cut off,
Ought to have his lips cut off,
And never kiss another . . ."

"If you play fair by Chris, I shan't tell any one anything," I said. "If you're in love with him, if you call yourselves engaged . . ."

As Elise, regaining control of herself, described the various ways in which one could be in love and explained when an engagement was not an engagement, I caught the echo of her parents debating the consequences of her unsettling May Week. "*If we give her rope enough . . .*," I seemed to hear them say; and, when Elise wanted Chris invited to Hampshire, they had invited him. She wanted to be engaged; they let her be engaged. All that

her father laid down was that the engagement was not to be published until marriage was a matter of practical politics and she had discovered whether she wanted to marry Chris or to be engaged before any of her friends.

"If you're going to end things, end 'em at once," I urged. "Don't pretend to be engaged to one man and in love with another."

"Are you inviting me to choose between you?," she demanded haughtily.

"The sooner I clear out of this the better," I said.

I had lost interest in her and was thinking of Chris as I had seen him, radiant, in the train; later I thought of the second letter that he would write to his father before there was time for an answer to the first. He did not appear at breakfast; and I surmised that Elise had led him away to hear her side of the story. It was not until the middle of the morning that I found him seated by the bathing-tent and conspicuously doing nothing.

"I must be back in London in time for lunch," I told him. "I was looking for you to say good-bye."

Chris made no sign of interest; and I felt that, if not disappointed, he ought to have been surprised.

"When d'you sail?," he asked perfunctorily.

"Saturday. Well, I congratulated you yesterday. I told you Elise was fascinating . . ."

"*Too* fascinating," he murmured.

"What d'you mean?"

Chris sucked at his pipe, found that it was out,

dug at the ashes with a splinter of drift-wood and began filling it again, all without looking at me.

"Elise told me that you tried to kiss her last night," he answered in a tone that he could not control. "She says you apologized this morning . . . I suppose that squares the account as far as she's concerned. She made me promise not to do anything; otherwise I'd have thrashed you till you couldn't see. I . . ." His voice quavered; and he cleared his throat noisily. "I didn't expect it of *you*, somehow."

For a moment I wanted to catch Elise Palmer by the shoulders and shake her till her eyes started out of her head. Then I wanted to laugh.

"You agree I'd better go . . . before any *more* harm's done?," I asked.

Chris stared at the sea without answering.

V

On my way to New York my temper cooled and my nerves grew steadier. If Elise Palmer had made me look a fool, if she had cost me Chris Young's friendship, if (as I can now confess) she had given me a bad scare, at least she had taught me a little about one side of some women. For the moment I was resolved to give them a wide berth.

My father received me with charming dismay. For the first time in ten years he had to decide what was to be done with me. I remember that we talked unenthusiastically of business, more warmly—on his side—of a year's travel, most keenly and long

—on both sides—of something which he vaguely described as " a roving commission ". Reduced to terms, this resolved itself into an allowance, which I was to name, and an indefinite period, in which I was to " look around ".

For the first time I was officially told something of my father's wealth, though even now he did not explain why he had so mysteriously concealed it from me. (" Time enough later," he explained vaguely. " You were only a child.") As, however, my academic education was over and as I had lived for ten years without getting into debt or being blackmailed, he informed me that I could now evidently look after myself, though but a year had passed since I was " a child ".

I returned to England in the autumn and took a set of chambers in Duke Street. Doris Canford at once secured herself a commission to furnish and decorate them; and one afternoon, while I was still considering curtains and carpets, my landlord entered to say that a gentleman had called but would give no name.

" I was afraid you might refuse to see me," Chris Young explained.

We shook hands with ill-disguised embarrassment; and I murmured something about not understanding him.

" I wanted . . . It . . . it was easier than writing," he stammered. " I know all about that business in Hampshire."

He spoke resentfully; and I wondered how much he really knew.

"We'll discuss it, . . . if we must," I said. "Have some tea, Chris?"

"Thanks. . . . I . . . came to apologize."

I rang for a cup and awaited his explanation.

"You weren't in love with her. She was in love with you," he went on. "Everybody likes you. And you saw I should be rather left . . . I was a fool to ask you down."

"There wasn't much time for any one to be in love with any one else," I interrupted.

From Chris Young's tone I felt that the trouble was not ended by Elise's resourceful lie.

"Oh, yes. You absolutely cut me out. And you saw it and tried to clear out before it was too late. When Elise pretended . . . Well, we needn't go into that, but it wasn't true." He held out his hand; and I took it. "She's . . . chucked me," he added.

I was not surprised; but I tried to make my tone sympathetic, for I divined even then that Chris had spent his one chance.

"Well, if that's how she feels about it," I said, "you're well out of it."

He made no direct answer.

"So I wanted to . . . apologize and . . . well, . . . thank you for doing what you could." We shook hands again. "It hasn't made any difference to our friendship?"

"It has strengthened it," I said.

That was more than twenty years ago. I suppose that, from time to time, if he is still alive, Chris Young still thinks of his first romance; I am afraid

that he always credited me with nobler conduct than I displayed. To me the episode is chiefly important in that Chris and I started on a new footing; since I ceased to patronize him, there was nothing that I would not do for him. This I tried to shew not long afterwards. . . .

Doris Canford, for the honour of the gold-rush which she was heading, told me that I ought not to raise expectations which I was unwilling to fulfil.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Sack of London

"By numbers here from shame or censure free,
All crimes are safe, but hated poverty."

DR. JOHNSON: *London.*

I

I SET out to tell of my skirmish with Elise Palmer, as I had already told of my earlier skirmish with Arkwright, because an adventure, irrelevant in itself, acquired importance by breathing new life into old loyalties. In the great crisis of these years, I was so torn by my allegiance to Doris and to Seymour and to Chris that I overlooked the allegiance which a man owes to his chosen wife and the duty which he owes to himself; and on three occasions, in three different ways, I have now tried to explain my allegiance to the three people who loomed largest in my life at this time. In the last analysis, Elise Palmer brought me back to Chris.

For the moment, too, she effected a noticeable (though, to judge by those who laughed at my romanticism, an impermanent) change in my outlook. For all the precocious experience picked up on big steamers and in cosmopolitan hotels, I

preserved a callow romanticism about the men and women of my own world. That Seymour Canford should ever be unfaithful was no more credible than that Doris should ever betray him; and, having said that, I have sufficiently indicated my simplicity of mind before Elise, lifting a curtain from the recklessness of passion and the unscrupulousness of self-preservation, set me speculating on curiosities and hungers which I had hitherto believed to be morbid, exceptional and, above all, the private affliction of men. For a time I told myself that this girl, like the men who disturbed my romantic ideals by forgetting a debt of honour and the women who upset my generalizations by taking a lover, was not one of "my people". This smug self-satisfaction, however, was short-lived; and by the time I reached New York I had embraced a cynicism as uncritical and as ill-informed as my earlier faith. Women, I said, were all the same; and a wise man gave them a wide berth, though I—better than most—was well able to look after myself. This arrogant mood of disillusion will explain my insufferable lectures to Doris Canford, my cocksureness with Lord Ashdown and my bland patronage of my father.

It was, indeed, useful and perhaps necessary when the ill-defined "roving commission" was propounded to Mr. Harper, our ambassador in London at this time. My father, who I feel excused his general neglect by repeating at intervals: "I've done my best for the boy. A good school, a good university, all the money he wants," had suggested

my being attached to the embassy; and Mr. Harper was promising to use his influence with the State Department if I were prepared to begin humbly and continue seriously. When I indicated that Christiania or Santiago, with diplomatic rank, attracted me less than London, without, Mr. Harper ceased to regard me as a useful addition to the service and began to eye me as only a questionably useful member of society. Who, he asked, were my friends in London, that I was so anxious to get back there? And, when I mentioned the Canfords, he sighed with patriotic regret that one more rich American should be burdened with a house where Lady Canford's friends could dine, a moor where they could shoot and, sooner or later, a wife for whom they had been unable to find a husband among their own people.

I explained that, as I had known Doris since we were children, I should at least not be taken by surprise.

"Who pays Lady Canford's bills?," asked the ambassador.

I should be sorry to guess how often that question was asked in the twelve years between Seymour's marriage and the outbreak of war. The answer, of course, was that we all paid them; some by commissioning her to decorate our houses, some by giving her stock-exchange tips and finding money if anything went amiss with them, some by making her presents in kind and some by purchasing the presents of others at her own price when she grew tired of them. Whatever we paid and however we

paid it, Doris gave us good value. Had any one urged that her way of life was undignified, I am sure that she would have agreed without hesitation ; but we were willing victims of her rapacity.

"It's a surprising thing in a close-fisted world," I answered with as much stilted impudence as I dared shew the ambassador, "but there's quite a lot of competition among her friends."

"I suppose that fellow Harborough is first favourite," said Mr. Harper. "What does Canford think about it? And Ashdown?"

I should have liked to say that Seymour Canford, herein setting an example which others might profitably follow, was minding his own business. All the energy and enthusiasm which he had shewn at school and was to shew again in the army were being devoted to the task of winning and maintaining his foothold on the treacherous slope of that financial peak which he had made it his ambition to ascend. I have sometimes felt that he was one of those who kept their public and private lives in watertight compartments and that he left Doris to her own devices on condition that she would leave him to his ; sometimes I have felt that he abandoned at the outset the barren responsibility of criticizing some one whom he could not hope to curb ; and always I am sure that he could trust his wife to stop dancing before she reached the edge of her precipice.

I could trust her equally. Apart from a curious sexual indifference, Doris knew well that open infidelity was perhaps the one Canford prejudice

which she could not talk down; and accordingly I felt obliged to defend her at intervals against a charge which was not the less plain for being unspoken. On this occasion Mr. Harper disconcertingly turned my defence into an indictment by murmuring blandly "My case, my lord" until I feared that the roving commission might be cancelled; but my newly discovered disillusionment, the fruit of Elise Palmer's teaching, seemed to impress my father, who ended the discussion by observing:

"She don't seem to have pulled the wool over your eyes . . . much."

"I hope I can look after myself, sir," I said.

So I had my way; and my father was free of me for another twelve months. Even when he was discussing my allowance, he told me hardly anything of his own affairs; and, in urging me to remember always the principles in which I had been brought up (whatever that might mean!), he never explained his long policy of mystification. Strange man! My sharpest memory of him dates from this triangular duel with Mr. Harper; and I recall, as though I had never seen them before, a round, red face framed in iron-grey hair and beard, a pair of penetrating blue eyes under shaggy grey brows, plump, hairy little paws and a sturdy, short body; the whole man square and substantial, in unvarying tweeds, tentatively nautical, like a tramp-skipper on holiday. My father smoked inordinately, until his beard, moustache and fingers were stained amber; he could digest without mastication and

never spent more than fifteen minutes on his dinner; four hours' sleep was all that he required; and he had never tasted alcohol in his life.

"Another recruit to the beauty-chorus," murmured the ambassador, as he took his leave.

I was to understand this parting gibe when I resumed my attendances in Hill Street and found myself one of a punctual group. Doris recruited some of us for looks, some for rank and some for wealth. From time to time our personnel varied; and I was one of the first to drop out. For a year or two, however, in the company of Dietrich and old de Nevers, young da Ricci and the Marquis of Silverdale—a pathetic and rather ignoble group—, I played the part of squire, champion, paymaster, agent, lady's-maid and secretary to Doris Canford. At the end I could boast with greater justification than at the beginning that I had no illusions.

I sailed for England in the autumn of 1907, with Mr. Harper for a fellow-passenger. Suspecting perhaps, that he had criticized the Canfords more freely than I liked, he changed his note, in the course of conversation on board, by hinting that, if Doris was really my friend, I ought to warn her of the unvarying questions and innuendoes that sprang to her critics' lips whenever she was mentioned.

"She's too young and far too pretty to risk getting a bad name," said the ambassador between puffs of cigar-smoke. "Men *don't* pay women's bills through good-nature, or for their health."

Mr. Harper's hint, if it had no other value, was

useful in polishing my spectacles for me. By now I had lived so long on the fringe at least of the Canfords' set, I had talked their language and—most important of all—I had seen so rigid a censor as Lord Ashdown being gradually subdued to his surroundings that, if any one expressed disapproval of the set, I dismissed him as provincial, therefore probably jealous and certainly ignorant. Not one of these facile tags could be tied to an ambassador who had been beloved in a dozen capitals before coming to London; and Mr. Harper made me uncomfortable when he said:

"Society is like a fruit-room, Weston: one rotten apple corrupts the whole of a shelf. Even if she remains unspotted herself, I can't easily forgive Lady Canford for cherishing rubbish that should be flung out of window. Why *must* she surround herself with men like Silverdale, da Ricci, 'the Baron', old de Nevers?"

The answer, if I had found the heart to give it, must have been that Doris shewed her highest genius and reaped her richest reward in forcing on society the men and women whom society had long been obstinately rejecting. When I had chosen my chambers and invited her to furnish them for me, I took the first opportunity, as a man who knew the world and understood women, of asking her whether the system of life was worth maintaining at the price she paid for it. I had been invited to inspect her Christmas presents; and, when she exclaimed: "*Isn't* it sweet? He asked me what I'd like. Of course, I *have* been rather

useful to him," I was reminded of the day when I copied out the list of her chosen wedding-guests and she set against each name the present which she counted on receiving. When we came now to a set of Russian sables, I caught Doris frowning.

" There's been a row about these," she announced. " ' The Baron ' gave them to me ; and papa-in-law thinks I ought to send them back. Likely, isn't it ? . . . Papa-in-law says, ' My dear daughter ' " (It was an excellent piece of mimicry), " ' you'll think me old-fashioned and I know that these distinctions are arbitrary, but, er, *clothing* and, er, *jewellery* . . . I think the line should be drawn *there*. It gives rise to comment.' Well, they can comment till they're tired ! People simply refused to know ' the Baron ' after his divorce ; but I took him up and he's naturally grateful. Papa-in-law leaves me to do all the work . . . But don't let's talk about it ! Good gracious, Nita wouldn't be in Paris now . . . *and* buying herself clothes and jewellery—' I think the line should be drawn there '—, if I hadn't bruised the money out of Harborough."

II

I COULD guess how the sable controversy would end, but I was only interested in it as a text for my lecture on the company Doris kept.

By this time we were all used to Harborough, but I had detected a new note in the criticism of the Hill Street menagerie when she opened her doors to " the Baron ". Though he is dead now,

I feel none of the reticence which death conventionally imposes; and in ventilating my personal dislike I am loosing a deeper disgust against the people who tolerated him. Carl Dietrich, senior partner of Dietrich Brothers, jocularly styled "the Baron": what a place he filled in London during the last years of King Edward and the first of King George! By the time he was repatriated in 1914, he had bought himself a house in London, a castle in Scotland and a stable at Newmarket; he had patronized politics to the point of receiving a privy councillorship and practised gallantries to the point of appearing in the divorce-court first as a co-respondent and then as a respondent. Against the Jockey Club and the Squadron, indeed, his money beat in vain; but the arts of Doris Canford were gradually undermining the resistance of those few houses that shut their doors against him. It may be objected that, as an American, I had no call to wax indignant over Dietrich's devastating march to power, but I had lived long enough in England to resent the insolence of this bloated creature who lounged through London, buying up such houses and furniture, such pictures and statues, such honours and influence, such satellites and mistresses, as took his fancy.

And still more bitterly did I resent the degradation of those who sold him their pride. When Doris told me that she must not offend "the Baron", I wondered if she could even imagine how "the Baron" talked of women. I always felt that, when he shook hands with one of them, he

was welcoming a new-comer to his harem; when he turned from the old friends to the new and from the new to those who were not yet his friends, I felt that his leer was shifting from the favourites of the past through those of the present to potential favourites of the future. I have been told that most of "the Baron's" conquests were achieved by his imagination, but this did not justify his manner in boasting of them.

"You feel as I do about Dietrich?," I asked Doris, who was receiving my lecture in disabling silence.

"But I can't speak as you do," she answered. "Until you've a husband and a son and a father and a sister-in-law and a brother-in-law and a father-in-law and a mother-in-law all dependent on you, you'll have no idea what you may have to put up with."

"But, Doris, they're *not* dependent on you," I remonstrated.

What can one ever say to people who make their own troubles? To understand Doris Canford's life in these feverish years before the war, one has first to understand her temperament. Whether Benjy was a deduction from Doris or Doris from Benjy, she had in childhood acquired the habit of managing her friends. Good-nature made her want every one to enjoy life; and her passion for arranging people to their best advantage would always lead her to snatch a new hat, obtained on credit or by blackmail, from her own head and give it away to some girl whom she thought it would

suit better. If indeed she had a hand in snatching Elise Palmer from Chris to make a match with me, she was following the strongest impulse of her temperament; and I feel that, had her influence survived into the reeling days that followed the war, she would have increased the tale of unions broken and resorted by decreeing that this husband and wife could not remain together longer when the new wife and husband whom she had chosen for them were in every way so much more desirable.

"I suppose you know you're being criticized very severely," I persisted, thinking of Mr. Harper.

"Moral courage," Doris sighed, "is the ability to say unpleasant things to the people whom everybody dislikes. Why am I in disgrace?"

"Because the people who care for you can't stand the things that are said about you," I answered. "That fellow Harborough . . ."

"I was told the other day that he was the father of my little John," said Doris. "It's not true," she added wistfully; "but what a lot of trouble I should be saved if it were!"

Flippancy was the least that I could expect; and, before I could break through it, Doris had cut short my lecture by whisking me into a taxi and driving me to the City. She had to make money, she explained, and to make it quickly. Would I not like to see her at work?

I had studied the financial system of the Canfords from so many points that I could not bring myself to refuse such an invitation. Half-an-hour later we stopped in Bishopsgate; and Doris thrust her way

into an office severely described as "*Dietrich Brothers, Bankers, London, Paris, Frankfort*", past an insufficiently agile commissionaire and into the parlour of "the Baron" himself. He frowned for a moment at the interruption; then his face cleared; and he murmured something in German to the men who were with him.

When we were alone, Doris introduced me hastily and proceeded to business.

"*Dear* Baron, I *must* have five hundred pounds! I don't want you to *give* it me, but isn't there anything that you can put me on to?"

Dietrich's frown had come back; and I saw him looking absently from an immense gold watch to the heads of the men with whom he had been closeted. They had been thrust into an anteroom and were visible through the glass partition, holding long cigars to their ears and whispering with conspiratorial absorption. I did not know "the Baron" at this time; I disliked his red face and bald head, his thick lips and tangled beard; but I felt for him. What line would my father have taken if Doris had burst into a meeting of the Ribling Corporation and demanded a Wall Street tip?

"Someting goot, hein?," mused Dietrich, with a second glance at his watch. He looked vaguely at me, as though wondering who I was, how much I knew and why I did not restrain her. Then he struck a bell on the table and said to a messenger: "Asg Mr. Reinhard do sdeb in here. Zid down, liddle Doriz. Zid down, Mr. Vesdon."

When Mr. Reinhard appeared, "the Baron" looked up dramatically and asked:

"Vod are Malay Imberial Develobmends, hein?"

"Twenty-three shillings, sir," came the answer from expressionless lips.

"Then puy, puy. Lady Ganford vould like tirty tousand." Then he turned to Doris; "You vill egskuse me, my tear, vile I dalg to dese chendlemen?"

Five minutes later Mr. Reinhard returned excitedly to say that, when it was known that Mr. Dietrich was a buyer, Malay Imperial Development shares had begun to soar. He dashed to and from the telephone to inform us that they were twenty-four shillings, twenty-five, twenty-seven. "The Baron's" head had joined his friends' on the far side of the glass partition; and I could see them resuming their interrupted discussion in cynical disregard of Doris and Malay rubber shares. After a quarter of an hour he returned with a cheque.

"I haf dold Reinhard do zell," he announced. "Zo eazy, hein? Ven you know how! Goot-pye, my tear! Goot-pye, Mr. Vesdon."

As we returned to Hill Street, I wondered whether Dietrich's time was really worth a thousand pounds an hour and, as a rider, whether Doris was so useful to him that he could afford to pay five hundred pounds to get rid of her whenever she chose to interrupt him.

"He's a perfect genius, that man," she murmured.

I thought none the worse of his ability when I turned up the official list and found that the Malay

Imperial Development Company existed only in the imagination of " the Baron " and of his confidential clerk.

III

THE deal in Malay rubber was an exercise in personality at the expense of " the Baron ". I was myself, if not the next victim, at least a quick successor. When I was at last established in Duke Street with a bundle of receipted bills, one liability remained undischarged; and I asked Doris to help me spend a little of my father's embarrassing allowance.

" My dear, I'd sooner die than take anything from you !," she cried. " If you like to buy me a box of chocolates . . . I'm an absolute pig about chocolates." . . .

As we walked, still arguing, up Bond Street, she stopped in front of the Elysée Motor Company and looked enviously at the 1908 model. The next day I returned to the Elysée Motor Company by myself. If any one feels interest in my motives, they are easily explained: Doris would have had that car from some one, perhaps with a buzz of mischievous chatter as accompaniment; I was sincerely grateful to her for the exquisite decoration of my rooms; my father's cheque was still burning a hole in my imagination; and, most strongly, when Doris let her face lengthen and her eyes grow wistful, sighing that she needed a car because she, honest-to-God, could not afford taxis, I should have felt a heartless brute if I had not given her whatever she wanted.

Even with motives as blameless (and insubstantial) as these, I did not wholly escape the buzz of mischievous chatter. Lord Ashdown came into Trent's one afternoon, as I was leaving, and kept me company to Duke Street and up to my rooms.

"That is a very handsome car you have given my daughter-in-law, my dear Arthur," he was good enough to say.

"I hope she likes it," I answered.

Doris had—characteristically—omitted to thank me for it.

"She does! She does!," Ashdown exclaimed. "And I hope, my dear Arthur, you won't think me very unappreciative if I tell you that I've come to give you a wigging about it."

He accepted a cigar and subsided into an armchair, with a bleak smile playing over his lined face and hinting that, though this was serious, we must remain good-tempered. In his repeated "my dear Arthur" I detected a note of paternal indulgence which, in old men, warns me to look for rudeness or impertinence.

"It was my father's money," I explained.

"That was hardly what I had in mind. . . . In *this* country . . ." I hope that I am not unduly sensitive, but I always suspect the man who overcourteously reminds me that I am not of his nationality. "If a young man of means gave dresses or jewellery or . . . or a car . . ."

"If Doris were a chorus-girl . . . ," I said, "instead of being a very old friend . . ."

"There are very few friendships possible between

young men and women," he interrupted with glum sententiousness.

"I hope Doris and I shall prove an exception."

Lord Ashdown made a gesture of reassurance:

"Life would be easier, my boy, if we could ignore what foolish people said about us. If I tell you that presents of this kind may compromise a woman . . . ? I'm afraid my daughter-in-law . . ." He paused and fingered the loose skin of his throat. "What we have to do—those who are her friends and well-wishers—is to secure her from the faintest breath of scandal. For her sake. For Seymour's sake. For all our sakes."

He held out his hand at the end of a speech which had cost him labour and pangs. I took it, because there was nothing else to do, though I felt that the appeal might have been more fairly addressed to Dietrich or Harborough, yet more fairly if less profitably to Doris herself.

"I'll do my best, sir," I promised.

"I knew I could count on you! If other people were as *unselfish* in their affection . . ."

As he stumped off, leaving me to finish his sentence for him as I thought fit, I reflected that it was hardly just to call affection selfish when it exhibited itself in a man's yielding, sometimes against his inclination and usually against his better judgement, to suggestions that were hardly distinguishable from demands. What was "the Baron" to do when Doris blackmailed him in his office? And, from the other side, what could Seymour or Lord Ashdown say when she explained that some one

wished to make her a present and that she had not the heart to disappoint him? About this time she extended her liabilities by "accepting" a house in the country; and I went to Pen Place, in the county of Sussex, with a melancholy curiosity to discover how this financial Atlas could support yet another world.

I found a rambling, fifteenth-century stone house with twenty acres of bracken, azalea and rhododendron; I learned that it had furnished itself—from which I inferred that, as on her marriage, Doris had levied toll on her uncomplaining friends—and that it cost nothing to keep up, though I dared not ask how fourteen guests, with six or eight maids and half-a-dozen chauffeurs, could make the week-end self-supporting unless the hostess presented a bill on Monday morning.

The answer had been given me by the time that I returned to London, bearing the fragments of a cherished illusion. Doris had shocked my New England conscience. After all these years I can still see the hot and crowded bridge-room, with the little tables pushed so close that, when once you were pinned in position, your escape was cut off. I can still see the faces becoming first flushed and then haggard; and, though I have forgotten the names of the players, I remember a young man who sat down drunk and played himself sober, a young woman who lost more than she could afford and then allowed "the Baron" to insist on her not paying and an old woman who shuffled and dealt with uncanny speed and belatedly told people to

hold up their hands because she could see all their cards. I remember Benjy Merton, playing with strangely un-English determination to win and becoming anecdotal, later, over his whisky; and I can still hear a ubiquitous group of rich, discontented young women publicly comparing notes on the tiresomeness of their absent husbands.

In looks Doris was fresher than when she came to Lanesborough with soft brown eyes and the pink tip of her nose peeping over an ermine collar; in manner, experience had made her more composed. She now talked, however, rather loudly; she danced with too little restraint; and, herself remaining cold, she allowed "the Baron" to lay his hand on hers, though—for what the difference may be worth—most women, I should have thought, would have preferred to be fondled by a gorilla.

"As a pot-house, I should describe Pen Place as expensive," yawned one of my fellow-guests, as we drove to the station on Monday.

At three o'clock that morning we had sat with weary heads pressed inimically together over the bridge-book.

"We're too young," I said, remembering the welcome accorded to Dietrich.

"If you go by age," retorted my companion, "I should have thought Harborough was a bit old for the Canford girl."

So wide and wild were some of Doris's plans, so unreservedly did she discuss them with the first-comer, that I had to receive the announcement seriously.

"Is that the home-coming they're preparing for Lady Anita?," I asked.

"Well, if *she* doesn't marry him, some one else will; and Doris won't willingly let the money go out of the family," said my companion. "I wonder," he continued dispassionately, "how long it will be before Doris goes off the rails. So far she has given people fair value in one way or another; but every day now she's taking more and giving less. Soon she'll have only herself to give."

"I don't think you know her as well as I do," I said.

"Oh, she'll make a virtue of it. Sacrificing herself for the good of the family and all that sort of thing. Well, it's a funny world. I don't see myself coming here again, though."

"And, if you do, I don't think you'll meet me."

For some time after that I was always engaged when Doris asked me to dine or spend another week-end at Pen Place. She was not long in guessing that estrangement underlay my steady refusal of her invitations; and, still strong in the belief that I was a salted man of the world and that men of the world had the right to lecture their friends, I told her that, instead of hoisting her present associates to her own level, she was letting them drag her to theirs. She was first angry, like every woman who is criticized, and then upset, like every woman who cannot demolish criticism with a show of bluster.

"You don't in the least understand," she kept saying; and, when I tried to end an unprofitable

discussion, she insisted on coming to my rooms and justifying herself until half-past four in the morning.

IV

THOUGH I cannot remember details—save that we repeated ourselves interminably—, I must have remained unconvinced, for next day she wrote me an inconsequent appeal:

"*You* must *make friends, dear Arthur. I'm in disgrace and so very lonely. Last night, while I was talking to you, papa-in-law, who was bringing Anita back from a dance in St. James' Square, came along Duke Street. I don't know what he doesn't believe, though I* told *him I'd known you since you were a baby. Arthur dear, d'you remember when you first came to England and I used to kiss you good-night in your cabin? I've always loved you and I believe you've always loved me, so I can't bear to have you hating me. Some day I'll explain about the Pen Place menagerie; I don't like the people there particularly, but for one reason or another I had to have them. When shall we meet? Or, my stern young judge, perhaps I should say 'Will Mr. Weston ever consent again to meet poor little Lady Canford, who's just dying to see him?' Don't come here for a bit, because papa-in-law is really angry: with you even more than with me.*"

So much, I said to myself, for Lord Ashdown's latest ally. For a moment I thought of telling him that I, if any one, was to blame; but, as I have hinted, an excuse for not visiting Hill Street at this

season chimed with my mood. Looking back and indulging in the dear vanity of might-have-beens, I could argue that, if I had gone to see Doris, she would not have felt obliged to come and see me; if we had been entirely free from suspicion, we should have escaped later, with a warning, when we were in fact compromised. Now, even now, when the last drop of bitterness has drained away, I remember with horror my helplessness at the moment when I appealed to my character, my record, and was told that my record was a hostile witness. It was like being arrested on a grotesque charge and finding that one's word was not instantly accepted, with an apology, by the policeman. Yes, I suppose I was scoring a black mark against myself for meeting Doris furtively; and, at least to Lord Ashdown, it seemed that I met her furtively because I feared to face an expression of his displeasure. He would never have believed that I was trying to avoid her!

He would not even believe that I met her but once at this time. I was entering the Ritz one night, when she came out with young Silverdale; and, knowing that I disliked her escort, she sent him on to her next party and promised to follow him as soon as she had discussed a piece of highly important business with me.

"Tell Lady Brightstone I'm coming in half-an-hour. You may give me supper," she told Silverdale.

"Nothing the matter, is there, Doris?," I asked.

"That's for you to say," she answered with a

sigh. "My little Johnnie has been ill, but I hope and pray he's all right now. . . . Come for a walk, Arthur! It's a perfect night."

I do not know whether she gently pushed me towards Duke Street, but we were standing at the door of my rooms long before she had finished justifying herself.

"Remembering Lord Ashdown's views . . . ," I began, as she walked through the open street-door.

"My dear, if I'd started listening to him," she interrupted, "we should all have been in the workhouse years ago." She gave a hard little laugh of bitterness which recalled the night when she had come to break the news of her engagement to Seymour Canford. "We must thresh this out, Arthur. Now I know you disapprove of me . . ."

"I disapprove of your wearing yourself out," I said, "for something that's not worth having."

"But can I help myself? Look at the people who depend on me! Father. Well, he's a permanency in Hill Street. Seymour. He's a dear fellow, but he wouldn't keep a single directorship in open competition. *That's* why I have to be sweet to people like Sir James Harborough and 'the Baron'. And, if I didn't make myself a *little* cheap, they'd feel they weren't enjoying themselves and that I was stuck-up. Don't imagine I like it, my child." She gave a little shiver. "And don't imagine that, if you thought all night, you could find anything crueller to say than that I was sinking to their level. Don't I know it? I watch myself and feel that I'm getting common. Or common*er*,

if you like . . . No! I don't believe you really think badly of me . . ."

"But why make yourself responsible for all these people?," I interrupted. "One sound, permanent job for Seymour, however modest . . ."

Doris walked round the room, inspecting the furniture which she had chosen for me.

"You'd like to see us taking up a government grant of land in Canada?," she asked over her shoulder.

"It's drastic, but there's no discredit in it."

"Ah, my child, that's the weak point in my character. Or one of them. You remember, when you were most in love with me, I warned you I was nothing like as good as you thought. I *must* live in the big world. I must have a certain amount of . . . let's say 'luxury' straight away; I want more than 'comfort'. By spending a lot of money I give a 'good time' to people who think that parties at Pen Place constitute a 'good time'. And that brings in more money. Heaven knows what we're spending, but it doesn't benefit us more than by the actual food and clothes we can buy."

I then put a question which had soured for want of expression ever since I first went to Ashby Hall as a very irreverent, very American boy of thirteen.

"Why doesn't Ashdown sell the place in Leicestershire and invest the proceeds in consols?"

Doris shook her head with the patience of one who had thought out and rejected all expedients beforehand:

"Poor dear, it would break his heart! And

Seymour's. I feel so guilty sometimes for marrying Seymour instead of finding him a rich wife and myself a rich husband. If I could find the right man for Anita . . . She's becoming quite a beautiful girl; and the right man could make such a wonderful place of Ashby. As Anita's husband he'd have an interest in keeping the place in the family; my in-laws could join dear father in my 'home for decayed parents'; and, when they died, Seymour and I could turn out Anita and her Fortunatus and move in. We *must* have got some money by then."

Though I remembered Anita only as a red-haired, stocky child from the nursery, this talk of selling her for pin-money disgusted me.

"You *are* a mercenary little creature," I told Doris. "Because Ashdown's too proud to sell and too fastidious to work for a little honest money, because *you* must have a certain amount of luxury . . . is there anybody you won't sacrifice?"

Doris sighed and crossed the room to sit on the arm of my chair.

"You were just complaining that I sacrificed myself!"

"Yes, that's what rankles most."

She sighed again and leaned over until her cheek was resting against mine:

"I suppose I'm one of the Unburied Dead, too; but some of us haven't had time or energy to transfer ourselves to a world where we *are* live men and women. You hardly knew me in the days when father and I touted for meals and beds at every

house from Inverness to Dover. I suppose I *might* have become a governess or a housemaid, . . . but not with that upbringing. I was trained to be charming to other parasites . . . and I think I've succeeded. But there's no room for us; and that's what makes it such dreadfully hard work." Her voice trembled; and a warm tear rolled between our cheeks. "Don't be too stern with me, young judge! People think I don't care and that it's rather exciting to live on the doorstep of the Bankruptcy Court. It's certainly exciting. . . . I've never talked to any one as I've talked to you, but you belong to a time before I felt so terribly old . . . *and* mercenary. I come to you to . . . get away from my fellow dead. So don't remind me. One wants a rest sometimes; one wants to be loved . . . Kiss me, Arthur, and then see if you can find me a taxi. The Earl of Ashdown will be wondering where I've got to."

In that, she overestimated her father-in-law's capacity for mental speculation no less than she underestimated his faculty of surprise. When I looked up, at a sound more felt than heard, Lord Ashdown was standing in the doorway.

"This," I whispered to myself over the sweet, scented head that she was resting on my shoulder, "is how you keep that promise to save Doris from the faintest breath of scandal."

V

I WAS afterwards to make a second and a more costly attempt, but I cannot feel that the first was

a success. All three of us recognized independently that enormous importance depended on our first words and actions; and I think we all rose to the occasion equally. At some unconscious movement of my arm Doris lifted her head and sat slowly upright; I, too, sat upright, without taking my arm from her shoulders; and Lord Ashdown played with the scarf round his throat. Then Doris said:

"Hullo!"

I said—How incredibly fatuous it seems now!—;

"Oh, here is your father-in-law, Doris!" (I nearly said "Here's papa-in-law.")

And Lord Ashdown, looking past me to Doris, said:

"John's not so well. We've had to send for the doctor. I'm afraid it looks like appendicitis. I went to the Ritz, but you'd gone. Then I tried Lady Brightstone. You weren't there, but young Silverdale . . ."

"Johnnie ill?"

Doris sprang up and began looking for her cloak. I always felt that she bore a son as she married her husband; it was part of her social campaign. Her concern, however, was adequately maternal.

"I have a taxi," said Ashdown to the room at large, as I moved to the door.

And a moment later I was left alone.

Next day I called in Hill Street. The misconceptions which he was allowing to cloud his mind were too serious to be left undisturbed, though—realizing that the English will cross a continent to avoid a "scene"—I was prepared to be told that

Lord Ashdown was out. The mechanical difficulty of getting the door opened, however, was solved by the sudden appearance of a girl with a latch-key.

"Arthur! . . . Or do I call you 'Mr. Weston'?," she asked, holding out her hand.

"Nita! . . . Not unless you say I'm to call you 'Lady Anita'," I answered. "You *have* changed!"

"I should have known you anywhere."

"How's the boy, . . . your nephew?," I asked, to gain time.

"The operation was quite successful, but it was only just in time. At that age, you know . . ."

Then we stood and took stock of each other. The red-headed, solid child had developed into a stately young woman with waving auburn hair and imperious grey eyes. I was a little frightened.

"What years it seems . . . ," I began.

"Do you remember our picnics in the ruins?," she cried with a smile that dazzled me.

"And stump-cricket in the tithe-barn on wet days?"

"And the time when you tied my pigtails to the back of the chair in church? Father *was* angry."

The flash of laughter in her eyes seemed to welcome me back to an intimacy whereof nothing was changed. Then my little vision of Anita Canford as my playmate of ten years before faded inexorably. Once again I had unfortunately angered her father.

"I want to see Lord Ashdown," I said soberly.

"Come in," she answered, unlocking the door

and leading me into the morning-room. "I'll go and look for him. Where are you to be found nowadays? We must meet, now that I'm home."

With a smile of delightful friendliness, she waved good-bye and ran upstairs. I was still brooding over the change in her appearance, when I heard the door softly closing and found myself face to face with Lord Ashdown.

"I want to explain about last night, sir," I began.

I thought that he looked greyer and was very much worried or very angry.

"I think you had better wait until Seymour is here."

"There's nothing I can say to you that I'd mind Seymour hearing. And he'd understand. Doris is a very old friend of mine, . . . has been, ever since I was a child. Last night she was upset and tired . . . I admit it looks a bit funny to find us like that, but it doesn't mean anything."

"Then I wonder you trouble to explain it."

"You looked so surprised."

"Wouldn't any one look surprised to find his own son's wife, lying like that, in a bachelor's rooms at midnight?"

While Lord Ashdown did not as yet suspect us of anything serious, it was more than time, I felt, for him to define what he suspected. I was hot and angry—without much excuse, I am afraid—to think that he regarded my rooms as the obvious place to seek his daughter-in-law.

"D'you believe I'm her lover, sir?," I asked.

Lord Ashdown did not answer intelligibly, but I caught a murmured " unpardonably coarse ".

Then he opened the flood-gates ; and, if I had to endure a bitter and not wholly deserved attack, I was content with the result, for he shewed, when pressed for a definite answer, that he did not believe Doris and I had been other than criminally indiscreet. I was being made a convenient scapegoat for all the other men who had helped to win her a bad name. At the end of an hour I believe I had made him feel, with me, that Doris was only imprudent ; but I did not convince him that any and every woman's reputation would be attacked so long as she spent by thousands while her husband earned by hundreds.

" You acquit us both, sir ?," I asked, as I got up to go.

" If any one *else* had come in . . . ," he exploded in a last clap of receding thunder.

" I can promise you, sir, that I'll never ask Doris to my rooms again. If you like, I'll promise never to kiss her again . . ."

" It oughtn't to be necessary ! When I was a young man, I never called a woman by her Christian name after she was married . . ."

We were interrupted by the arrival of Doris ; and Lord Ashdown, with a final severe nod but quite a cordial handshake, enquired how his grandson was and walked out of the room.

" I hope you were more successful than I was !," said Doris with a sigh. " There *may* be something that papa-in-law doesn't believe against me, but I

can't think of it." She bent down to pick up the stump of a cheroot from the hearth and threw it behind the fire. "*I* paid for that cigar."

"How do we stand now?," I asked.

"Where we stood before, of course!," she answered. "When once you're caught up in the machine, you can't escape." Her bitterness of expression and tone left her suddenly; and she threw her arms round my neck impenitently. "I don't know that I want to! The world's very amusing; and I've made a great success of life. London's full of rich people if you know where to look for them; there's no city in the world to touch it. Honestly, Arthur . . ."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Undeserving Poor

"O fortunati mercatores! gravis armis
Miles ait, multo jam fractus membra labore.
Contra Mercator, navim jactantibus Austris,
Militia est potior."

HORACE: *Satires I.*

I

BY the time that I left Hill Street after my precarious reconciliation with Lord Ashdown, I had wholly forgotten his strictures and warnings. Once more standing on the doorstep, I could only think of Anita and of the eager friendliness with which she decreed that, now she was back in England, we must meet again. Though Doris had spoken of her as "a little jewel", I had not troubled to imagine how attractive she might have become. Assuredly she would have the success of the year; and I was exhilarated by the knowledge that, while other men were struggling to make her acquaintance, she and I were already old friends. Of a sudden the London season became invested with a purpose.

To Doris I gave so little thought that I did not until long afterwards come to look on this day as marking a change in our relations, though I can see

now that she had dropped to second place in my interest; nor, until "the beauty-chorus" was set to learn a new dance, did I realize that Lord Ashdown might have called on her to mend her ways and that she found an excuse for her chorus by explaining that it had been recruited for Anita. In the accounts of dinners and dances at this time, I used to read that Lady Anita Canford was present with her sister-in-law; and in parties given before a ball I came across the names of Silverdale, da Ricci and the rest. It did not, however, occur to me immediately that Doris had overhauled and reclassified her friends, retaining for herself those who were innocuous, handing on to Anita those who might be useful and gently discarding those for whom no place could be found in her regenerate life. The first hint came when I was no longer asked to Hill Street; the second, when despite Anita's saying that we "must" meet I found my invitations countered with previous engagements. In a mood half hectoring, half suppliant, I demanded of Doris whether and why we were being kept apart.

"She goes out a great deal," Doris answered, "but there's so much on at present that I suppose she's in one place and you're in another."

As at this time I was going to an average of three parties a night, the odds against my not meeting either Doris or Anita were long.

"Won't you fix a night for bringing her to dine?," I asked.

"We're frightfully booked up," said Doris, exhibiting less than her usual desire to please.

Though the phrase sounded natural enough, I felt that it was premeditated; and, like a shadow at her elbow, I seemed to see Lord Ashdown prompting Doris with plausible words of discouragement. "*You can say she goes out a great deal. Presumably, you can say, she was at a different party. If he asks you to dine, you can say you're very fully engaged.*" The cordiality of the Ashdowns had varied so little since they first invited me to Ashby that I feel ungracious in putting these words into their mouths. Even, however, without Doris's later avowals, I knew their outlook well enough to guess how, when Anita returned from Germany, they had reminded each other that she was now grown-up and must be circumspect in the friendships which she made and in those which she preserved.

"Do I understand that I'm no longer welcome?," I enquired bluntly.

Doris at least was not gagged by the constitutional reticence of the Ashdowns, though she refused me a direct answer:

"My dear, you know I'm devoted to you. Papa-in-law is still rather angry, though, and I'm afraid that, if I annoy him again, he'll snatch Nita away to Ashby just when I'm . . . well, establishing her." She sighed and rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand. "It will be such a relief to me . . ."

"When you've married her off?," I asked.

"Yes. And married her suitably. I suppose the middle classes envy us our position, but they can't imagine the difficulty of keeping it up. And

we envy the middle classes their impregnable prosperity without realizing their infinite narrowness and tedium. There's no satisfying anybody, though I really think I shall take a year's rest when once I've got her off my hands and seen the lease of Ashby signed . . ."

"Are you seriously offering Anita as a consideration?," I began furiously.

"From the way you talk, you might be in love with her yourself!," Doris laughed.

"I've known her since she was a child and I like her . . . immensely," I answered stiffly. "I don't know whether you're serious about old Harborough . . ."

"He has helped me; and I must help him," said Doris. "Of course I could find some other girl, but I shan't let him go while there's a chance of using him for Nita and Ashby. If you want her to marry somebody of her own age, you should do something about it. *I'm* not hindering you . . ."

"And you're not helping much, either," I retorted, with embittered memories of my unsuccessful invitations.

"I would if I saw the slightest response from Nita, even though papa-in-law still thinks you're in love with me, even though you're shewing me so unflatteringly that you're not! I can't do anything, though, till Nita wakes up. She's a funny child. With all her gentleness, she's very stubborn: no one can make her marry against her will. And the utmost I can do is to parade the likeliest men

for her inspection, including Harborough, to whom she's very much indebted. If you care to join the parade . . . I warn you, as I've warned her, that being in love makes you very unhappy . . ."

"Have I any chance?," I asked, breaking through her flippant worldliness.

"That you must prove for yourself. I only part with Nita to the highest bidder. You must meet all comers . . . and beat them."

"I'm not afraid of Harborough," I muttered with the arrogance born of youth and a general reputation for tolerable looks.

"Perhaps you ought to be," she answered.

So encouraged in one sentence and mocked in the next, I was left to discover whether I was in love with Anita and to decide for myself whether she would ever warm to anything more than the uniform friendliness which she displayed when Doris—her warning issued—contrived meetings between us. If to be in love was to be unhappy, I could not have been in love at first. Anita was a perfect companion; and I was content merely to be with her, only becoming uneasy when Doris enquired what progress I was making and I had to answer that we had not advanced beyond an exchange of infantile reminiscences. That, decided Doris, was not very promising; but, apart from telling me that I should frighten Anita if I tried to force the pace, she offered no advice.

Meanwhile, though I was barred from speaking, I began to writhe in the knowledge that others were being encouraged to speak. The parade

arranged for Anita became a means of deflecting the attentions of men whom Lord Ashdown now regarded with outspoken disapproval; and I was present when Doris intimated to Lord Silverdale that, instead of vainly worshipping her, he would be more profitably employed in paying court to her young and unencumbered sister-in-law. Similar advice must have been given in other directions; and I noticed that, when Silverdale was not escorting Anita, his place was taken by da Ricci, Strathpeden, de Nevers or another of the men who constituted the "beauty chorus"—as the American ambassador termed it—of the parties at Pen Place or in Hill Street.

True to her word, if Doris did not help, at least she refrained from hindering me; and on the morrow of our discussion Anita was brought to dine. After that we met almost daily. When we had not arranged to go to the same parties, some one arranged it for us; we were put next to each other at dinner and invited to the country for the same week-ends.

After the clatter of Hill Street, which reminded me of a stock French farce with people coming and going through five or six doors at the same time and all talking at the top of their voices, I was enchanted by Anita's dignity and reserve. She had, indeed, acquired from Doris, who invented half and stereotyped the rest, all the modish colloquialisms of those years. With her, as with all her set, a person "had charm" or "had temperament"; an oak table or a lacquer cabinet was "amusing";

a dull party was " grim ", a dish " apolaustic " and a bore " debilitating ". Beneath the patter there lay, however, a manner of repose and a habit of meditation as impressive as they were rare in those days when emancipation went to the heads of the girls until—as Humfrey Barlow said in August, 1914—" if there had been no war, it would have been necessary to invent one." To Doris, shrewdly watching, it was a matter of equal amusement and surprise that I should be attracted by a girl so quiet and, by comparison, so lifeless. She could not understand, though she entertained no resentment, that Anita's remoteness could charm any man who had responded to her own warmth and intimacy. Acting perpetually, in the phrase I have used before, as broker for men who wished to buy and women who had something to sell, Doris would have laughed with the same good-humoured cynicism at the protective instinct in a man and at an impulse of gratitude in a woman. Nevertheless I believe that, if a single trait can explain any human being, Anita Canford is to be explained by her passionate desire not to take without giving ; and, at least in my relations with her, I was moved—and restrained—by a reverence that made me want to worship her at a distance. Of this the best proof is that, though I was asked a score of times in the coming years to describe Anita, I never succeeded. She was a vision that faded when I looked at her.

And there was something almost dreamlike in our meetings at this time. Though she gave me repose, neither by speech nor manner did Anita

give me a hint of anything more; and I wished at times that I was not an old friend. Avowedly, she regarded me as a brother; if any one remarked on our intimacy, it was explained that I had been brought up with the family since I was a child; and Doris, with her usual acuteness, discovered that we were both the victims of habit.

"Are you going to America as usual?," she asked me one day as the season drew to its close.

"I don't know how that will help things," I answered morosely.

"I think you'll only make yourself unhappy if you stay here," she explained, now with honest sympathy. "You're doing no good. Nita's not in love with you; and I can't feel you're very much in love with her. You're each of you a familiar piece of furniture in the other's life."

True as I knew her diagnosis to be, I would not admit it.

"I don't give up hope yet," I told her.

"You must decide, but you can't say I haven't given you a fair trial," she sighed.

"What does that mean?," I asked.

Doris, however, found it easier to shrug her shoulders than to answer.

I might have drifted indefinitely, if I had not received a challenge which caused all concerned to examine their position. In the middle of July Anita told me that she was going to spend a week-end with Sir James Harborough. She would have preferred to stay in London; but in this, as in all things, she accepted her parents' decisions without

question and attempted no more than to gild a pill that could not be refused. I was flattered that the gilding of this one took the form of her asking whether I could not come too.

"Not selected," I told her.

"But will you come if he invites you?"

As I had already been once or twice to Harborough's house near Medmenham, I judged that our relations were amicable; as he did not include me now, I told Anita that he could not want me.

She was silent for a moment, then turned with a pathetic little movement of entreaty:

"But if *I* want you?"

"Then of course I'll come! Don't you know there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you?"

Though the words need not have been interpreted literally, my tone was meant to convey a declaration. If it was unwelcome, she could have laughed it away; if she had been waiting for a sign, she could have encouraged it. Characteristically elusive, Anita withdrew to her shadow-wrapped distance in the moment of laying her hand on my sleeve and smiling as though our understanding was complete:

"You're a dear! You've always been a wonderful friend . . . ever since we were children at Ashby. Will you have time to come there before you go to America?"

"I would cancel my passage to come," I told her. "We'll fix a date at Medmenham."

When Harborough threw me an invitation in the street two days later, his manner held so little

cordiality that I fancied my presence would unsettle the make-up of his party. At another time, though I am tolerably easy-going, I would have flung back the invitation with as much courtesy, no less and no more, as he had stirred himself to shew me; but Anita's timid appeal warned me that we were approaching a crisis, though her family—at Paddington—and her host—at Medmenham—gave no sign that they desired my support in overcoming it. After a dinner of silences and black looks that made me feel like a child in disgrace, I begged Anita in mingled fury and desperation to help me win a brief respite by coming on the river and to explain why she had invited me to be pilloried.

"The river?," cried Harborough, who in my hearing before dinner had ordered the punts to be left at the landing-stage. "Absurd! You'll give her her death of cold."

"What d'you think about it, Anita?," I asked.

She looked from the one to the other. Harborough was making noises and gestures of protest; but I, though a guest in his house, refused to yield ground. I believe that the touch of stubbornness told with her.

"I can take a coat," she said.

II

WHEN we were out of hearing, I warned Anita that I must go back to London next day.

"What I'm supposed to have done," I said, "I don't know; but I'm not going to be sent to Coventry like this."

"If *you* desert me . . . ," Anita began. Then her voice broke; and she hid her face from me. "When you *said* you'd do anything . . ."

"I meant it. What d'you *want* me to do?"

"I don't know! I'm *frightened*!," she whispered. "Promise you won't leave me alone." I made a movement, but she waved me back to my end of the punt. "They're sure to be watching us."

Cured of any belief that I was a man of the world or understood women, I paddled in silence until Anita, with her composure restored, told me that it was time to go back. Though she said nothing to explain what had unnerved her, the new resolution in her tone reminded me of the change that had overtaken Doris when I sculled her down to the ruins on the day of Seymour's coming-of-age. If her feeling was the one which I attributed to her, she was awed by the invincible efficiency of her host. From the day when, as children, we followed him about Ashby and heard him planning to modernize the place, he had become more sharply defined as a man who knew what he wanted and got it done at the lowest cost and in the shortest time. The brass-rails and pipe-clayed ropes on the landing-stage (supplied at contract prices from the Starling Line stores), the electric launch and fleet of cars impressed even a man who had studied the ways of millionaires on Long Island; but I was roused to greater admiration by Harborough's ability to get the Ashdowns' entire family down to Medmenham, to make a bid for their daughter and, until I intervened, to cherish every hope of success.

In Anita's place and with her tradition of obedience, I might well have despaired of preserving my fragile spirit and person from the grasp of this Colossus.

To this day I hardly know how she mustered strength to resist; and I have wondered whether these exquisite but enfeebled children of an exhausted stock had each one flicker of resistance, as when Seymour asserted himself at school. Perhaps the trifling, half-seen contest of wills between Harborough and me first shewed Anita that I was not indifferent, perhaps my modest championship tided her over the moment when she might have surrendered to the herd-hypnotism of the family. As we entered the house, Harborough's influence over her was insubstantial as the grey spiral of smoke from his cigar.

Coming into the hushed and expectant drawing-room, I felt a wave of collective hostility, from Harborough, Doris and the Ashdowns, lapping my ankles, rising to my knees and swirling about my waist. The spell, however, was broken. Doris rallied, like a sensible woman, and made a success of the party, though she smiled ruefully on the Monday, when she dropped me at my rooms and I asked her how to thank Harborough for a week-end that had not been distinguished either by kindness or by hospitality.

"*You* oughtn't to complain," she answered. "You've done what you wanted. It may interest you to know that Harborough has decided—for the second time—that it wouldn't pay him to sink

a lot of money at Ashby. He used those words to papa-in-law! 'It wouldn't pay' him."

I was more interested to know that Anita had refused to give herself as consideration for letting Ashby above its market price.

"Am I responsible?," I asked.

"Oh, that's the least of your crimes," Doris laughed. "You've cost me Harborough's friendship. I can't afford to lose rich friends. At *any* time. And just now I'm up against it, Arthur . . ."

Her latest financial embarrassment was the severest that Doris ever had to face. It began on the day, some weeks before my disconcerting visit to Medmenham, when Dietrich said mysteriously: "Geeb your eye on Bineapple Reefs, liddle voman, but don't go delling eferybody. And don't douch tem mit a bole dill I gif de vord." Doris, however, had already proved that she could not keep good luck to herself, if a hint from the wizard of Bishopsgate would enable her friends to grow rich with her. Within an hour of his whispered confidence, Hill Street punters nodded sagaciously and ascertained that Pineapple Reefs then stood at a little over seven shillings.

Benjy Merton and Lord Ashdown bought at eight.

"I dell you ven to puy," Dietrich promised Doris at their next meeting.

In one day the shares rose to nine, ten, twelve and fourteen shillings, as the punters forced up the price. A tip from "the Baron" was not to be disregarded; and, when they had bought for them-

selves, they handed on the good advice to friends who then acquired the shares on a steadily rising market. The Canfords' butler, who was a valued friend of mine, bought at fifteen, sold at twenty-eight and told me about it at thirty-one. This was my first hint of a coming boom; and I will confess to excitement when I discovered that Pineapple Reefs, unlike the Malay Development shares, were quoted on the Stock Exchange.

In a mood of curiosity, if not of suspicion, I visited Somerset House and inspected the register of the company. High among the biggest of the shareholders figured the name of Dietrich; and I returned with a sense of relief, not unmingled with surprise, at finding that "the Baron" was heavily committed to the concern on which he had urged Doris to keep an eye. Thereafter, except for a moment when I myself caught the gambling fever, I watched the spread of the epidemic dispassionately and from a distance.

It was a speculation in which, properly handled, every one stood to gain, for, so long as Pineapple Reefs rose and rose, all could job in and out at a profit. Humfrey Barlow, who knew the difficulty of making money well enough to husband it when made, informed me that he had bought five thousand shares at ten and a fraction, sold them at twenty-nine, bought again at thirty-one and sold at forty-seven. Then he shewed the prudence to stop, knowing little of the stock market and less of Pineapple Reefs. And, lest any one charge me with superiority, let me amplify an earlier hint by saying

that I bought five thousand at thirty-three and sold them at forty-six.

The excitement among the amateur punters exceeds my power of description. From the tone of the rumours in Hill Street you would have pictured the Pineapple Reef—I do not yet know in which continent it lies—as a place where men barked their shins on nuggets the size of coal-boxes and waded to the waist in a quicksand of gold-dust. And the crazy optimism was not confined to a single luncheon-party of cunning and rapacious amateurs. My broker told me that Pineapple Reefs spread like a prairie-fire from Hill Street to Hampstead, from London to the country, from Lord Ashdown and Benjy Merton to Seymour's typist and a petty officer on board Raymond Canford's ship. Clerks, warehousemen, caretakers, servants, clergymen, the inevitable widows and the no less inevitable half-pay officers flooded unknown and inoffensive brokers with orders to buy Pineapple Reefs. Some applied for single shares; others sent pathetic money-orders for two or three pounds.

Doris waited for Dietrich to give the signal, but he seemed to have been caught unprepared.

"No use puying now," he sighed, when the shares had raced from seven shillings to fourteen.

"Zerdainly no use puying *now*," he added a few days later when the closing price was twenty-six and threepence.

She was disappointed at the wasted opportunity and enraged by friends who told her that they had bought on her advice when the shares were still

under ten shillings. When the price advanced from twenty-six shillings to forty-two, she was still more disappointed; "the Baron" either did not know what he was saying, when he told her not to touch the shares with a pole, or else he was grossly neglecting her interests. There seemed no limit to the dizzy height which Pineapple Reefs might attain. When they stood at forty-seven she invited him to dine and pleaded for a chance of sharing the good fortune of her friends; Dietrich would only shake his head and say that the shares *must* have reached the top of the market. When they bounded to fifty-four, she railed at him by telephone. At sixty-one, when he declined to argue with her, she bought on her own responsibility.

I have forgotten how long it took for a one-pound share to rise from seven shillings to sixty-one, the price at which Doris bought and one of the biggest shareholders on the register of joint-stock companies at Somerset House decided to unload. And I have forgotten how long it took for the shares to fall from sixty-one shillings to a nominal two-and-sixpence, the price at which they became unsaleable. For a day or two Doris watched the fall and told herself that one must expect fluctuations when the rise had been unbroken for so long (she was herself prepared to sell at seventy). For a day or two longer she lacked moral courage to tell Dietrich that she had speculated against his advice. By the time that she confessed to him and divined that he had used her as an advertising agent to boom the shares, the bottom had fallen out of the market.

I never heard at what price she sold. I have no idea how much she bought. When we returned, however, from our unsettling week-end at Medmenham, Doris had her jewellery and household effects to stand between herself and insolvency.

When I heard the story from Humfrey Barlow, who was at this time prospecting in Hill Street for a new kind of literary ore, I begged her to let me help salve the family fortunes. It is to her credit that she refused, perhaps even more to her credit that she left me to find out the nature of her disaster. It was seemingly irreparable, for she could not go to Harborough ; and Dietrich always stated plainly that he gave advice but did not lend money. Of her other friends, those who had held on were all more or less involved in the collapse of Pineapple Reefs ; and even those who had got out in time felt that Doris was a dangerous friend, if she intended to let " the Baron " station her on the bank to urge others into the mill-stream. Her personal stock stood so low that I believe she was thrown entirely on her own resources. There were great pledgings and sellings in those days ; Pen Place was let to one of my countrymen, entertaining at Hill Street came to an end ; and, when I called to see Doris in the last week of the season, the house looked as if her landlord had been distraining for rent.

III

THE story of her catastrophe spread to almost every house that had been attacked by the Pineapple-Reef epidemic.

"I don't know what the poor little woman will do," I heard a man say, as I travelled back to London after a week-end in the country.

"D'you know the sister-in-law?," drawled his companion; and I began to listen more attentively. "She'll be used as a stalking-horse, I suppose. Quite a nice girl, every one tells me."

"She's not always so tractable as she might be," said the first. "There was our friend from Liverpool. . . . Some one was saying they'd got a young American in tow. Pork-packer, or something of the kind."

"I heard that, too," answered his companion.

The indiscretions of strangers in a railway carriage could be treated with the disdain they deserved. Indeed, I did not know how else to treat them. It was another matter altogether when my friends indulged in meaning nods and raised eyebrows. That same day at luncheon, while my temper was still simmering, Humfrey Barlow asked me when I was going back to America. I spoke of two or three houses which I had promised to visit first; and at the mention of Ashby Hall he smiled, maddeningly but unmaliciously. It was a trifling cause of offence, for Humfrey had more than once chaffed me with impunity; when, however, Anita's name was made the subject of impertinent gossip in clubs and trains, I felt that I must dam it at source. During the week after our return from Medmenham I had tried eleven times to see Anita, and, as we were to say a few years later, to consolidate the position I had won. I had tried in vain. Barlow

contributed to my destiny by giving me an excuse to find, once and for all, how I was regarded.

"I shall go to New York when I leave Ashby," I told him. "That reminds me! I must find out when they're expecting me. Good-bye."

No one was at home when I reached Hill Street; but Anita returned in time for tea. I reminded her that she had still to crown her invitation with a date and was not unnaturally surprised when she said that she was not expecting me. At first she pretended that there had been no time to collect a party. When I assured her that I did not want a party, she protested that the house was too dilapidated for entertaining. When I said that I should still want to visit her if the roof had fallen in, she drew herself up, like a prosecuting counsel when his trap has closed, and rapped out:

"After Pineapple Reefs?"

"What on *earth* d'you mean?," I cried.

"We're a little—what shall I say?—tarnished?," she suggested with a cold bitterness in startling contrast to her normally baffling aloofness.

"Am I 'tarnished'," I asked, "because the horse I backed for the Stewards' Cup was left at the post? You ridiculous child! That was just bad luck."

"Perhaps that wasn't quite what I meant," she murmured and glanced impatiently at her watch. "I wonder what *can* have happened to Doris?"

"What *did* you mean?," I persisted.

Anita rumpled her auburn curls with trembling fingers.

"Oh, I don't know! Some people have been so horrid," she answered vaguely.

Obviously she did know what she meant; and I intended that she should say it. The afternoon sun was shining full on her face; and I could see that her cheeks were scarlet.

"What did they say?," I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders and swallowed:

"Well, you know when I asked . . . , *begged* you to come down to Medmenham? They said I was running after Sir James. . . . *Raymond* told me that, my own brother! He said: 'The family's all very well, but you're not going to marry that old guy . . .' It was the first I'd dreamed . . . And then I saw that he was right; everything was being arranged over my head; letting Ashby . . . And the whole family invited down. I was never so frightened in my life. At first I thought of pretending to be ill, but I knew that that would only be postponing the trouble. . . . I *made* Sir James invite you, so that it shouldn't look quite such a family circle. . . . I felt you'd protect me, keep him from saying anything. And you did. . . . I oughtn't to be talking like this; it isn't fair on Sir James, who's always been very sweet to me, but it was such a *shock*. And coming just on top of the crash . . . Every one would have said that I was marrying him to pay for the Pineapple Reef shares. I don't know *how* father and Seymour raised the money . . ."

"But you wouldn't have married him in any event," I said.

"I'd never thought of it," she answered with a return of the remoteness which always made me feel that she would never descend from her mountain mists to think about anything.

I wanted more than that, but she would not give it me.

"Why did you say 'after Pineapple Reefs' to *me*?," I asked, still nettled.

"Oh . . . I don't know!"

"Were you afraid people would substitute me for Sir James?," I enquired, remembering with a rush of blood to my head the impudent, drawling conversation in the train.

"I shouldn't like you to be compromised," Anita answered in a voice as tart as my own.

I crossed the room and took her hand. She struggled like a frightened animal, then became suddenly, alarmingly still.

"If any one said there was the slightest possibility . . . ," I began, then stopped because the pulses in my head were hammering.

Anita dragged at her hand; and I let it slip through mine.

"What nonsense we're talking!," she cried. "It's my fault, but that share business got on my nerves. . . . How long will you be in America?"

"I don't know. Anita, if people *did* say . . . Would you feel compromised?"

"Of course I should . . . Arthur, you mustn't talk like this!"

"But if it were true?"

All the colour flooded out of her cheeks; and her grey eyes darkened and swam.

"Arthur, I . . . honestly don't know what you mean," she stammered.

"I've just asked you to marry me," I said, though in fact I had done no such thing.

Our English in that hour would have gained few marks as a mode of accurate expression!

"Please, please!" She covered her eyes and dropped limply on to a sofa, burying her face in a cushion. "Darling Arthur, you must give me time to think!"

If she had needed time, she would have put no prefix to my name. I dropped beside her and wrenched away the cushion. Somewhere at the back of my memory there was reconstructing itself another scene in a railway-carriage: I glimpsed Chris Young's puzzled face when I asked him how he had proposed to Elise Palmer and I heard again his bashful confession that "these things" did not "work out" at all as one expected and that there came a moment when a fellow simply could not help himself. One said the first thing that came into one's head; and there one was, engaged!

I have only once been engaged and I do not want to repeat the experience. It is far enough away now, yet I believe I could reconstruct it all, with every word that any of us used, every expression that I saw on the face of Anita or her mother or Lord Ashdown. I can still smell the mustiness of Ashby Hall when I went there for the first week in August. . . .

We were roused, on this first, incredible evening, by the grating of a latch-key. Anita whispered:

"That must be Doris."

I tried to compose myself and said, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"I'll wait till your father comes in and then tell him."

We heard Doris walking through the hall and—mercifully—upstairs without coming into the morning-room. For the first time I looked at my watch and realized that I was already late for dinner and should probably be late for the theatre. It mattered so little that I hardly had the consideration to send my host a telephone message. Such wits as I had were concentrated on the impending interview with the family; and I could only think of forms which I had met in books. "*Lord Ashdown, I ask your permission to pay my addresses to your daughter . . .*" Did young men still talk like that eight or ten years after Queen Victoria's death? "*Anita has consented to marry me; and I have come for your approval . . .*" I did not want to give him a loophole. . . . "*Anita and I are going to be married . . .*" That was a trifle abrupt. For a moment I pusillanimously meditated writing to him; but that only postponed the meeting and gave me no help in choice of phrasing. I felt instinctively that I had flint-wall opposition to face. I was not alone in thinking of Anita as something too ethereal to be touched, too fragile to be grasped. I wanted to begin my assault while I was still intoxicated from her presence.

IV

At eight o'clock a car drove to the door; and Lord Ashdown hurried into the house.

I overtook him half-way up the first flight of stairs and asked if he could spare me a moment.

"I'm late for dinner already," he answered doubtfully. "Won't some other time . . .?"

"It's very important, sir. I've asked Nita to marry me; and she says she will."

I have sometimes feared that I existed in Lord Ashdown's destiny to administer violent and disagreeable shocks. To this day I can see him stopping short as though he had strained a muscle in his back; I can see him turning and slowly coming down three steps to meet me, but still maintaining his uncomfortable advantage of about six feet; I can still hear his stammer, as—after long silence—he fought for words:

"I . . . This is altogether . . . I mean, you must see . . . ," he expostulated. "You had no business . . . Without consulting me first . . ."

"I hadn't time, sir," I answered truthfully enough.

"But that is absurd, preposterous . . ."

Now, Lord Ashdown knew even better than I did that Anita was of full age. If she was capable of refusing to marry one man, she might be equally capable of marrying another. A hasty decision in either direction might have been fatal; and I observed him trying to achieve greater urbanity of tone:

"My dear Arthur, you must see that a question like this . . . We want time. I must think this over. . . . Meanwhile, I must insist that you do not say another word of this to Anita or any one else . . ."

"We regard ourselves as engaged," I interrupted.

"I cannot recognize *any* engagement . . . yet."

After that, I felt that there was nothing more to be done until he had discussed my audacious proposal with Lady Ashdown and decided finally what to make of my insecure social position and my debatable moral character. Was the son of a self-made American smelter—without a baronetcy but with a public-school and university education, twenty-six years old—a more unpalatable mouthful than a self-made shipping-magnate of fifty-three with the prospect of a peerage? The inglorious smelting was at least carried on four thousand miles from London. In looks and manners I could give Harborough many points. I could imagine that family council; and I learned afterwards from Doris that the speeches which I had imagined were similar in all essentials to the speeches delivered.

Characteristically and in general support of my eligibility, she informed the Ashdowns that, if Anita did not marry me, some one else would. And, characteristically, Seymour said "ditto" to his wife. I doubt, however, if she had even now convinced her relations that the greatest of all crimes was to let "good" money go begging; and Lord Ashdown bit wryly on the fact that I was an alien, an idler and a young man for whose hands the devil

would find work, if indeed he had not found it already. Lady Ashdown asked at intervals whether Anita thought I should make her happy. Raymond, the cosmopolitan, volunteered that the best Americans were hardly distinguishable from English people of the same class.

What turned the scale I do not know to this day, but an atmosphere of guarded welcome awaited me on my return to Hill Street forty-eight hours later. I could see Doris smiling in self-congratulation when Lord Ashdown said, as though his thoughts were only then taking shape, that he had been giving careful and (he might add) not altogether unfavourable consideration to my proposal. Anita, of course, was still so young that there could be no question of our marrying for some time; and it would be fairest and most satisfactory to us both if we did not consider ourselves even formally engaged.

"What do you mean by 'some time', sir?," I interrupted.

"Certainly not less than two years," he answered promptly enough, as though his thoughts had really taken shape some time before.

"I don't see it," I said, though Doris was making me signals behind her father-in-law's back.

"If you're really in love with Anita," said Lady Ashdown, "you ought not to mind waiting two years. We want you to feel quite sure of yourselves."

I looked at Anita; and she gave me a rare smile of encouragement.

"We're quite sure of ourselves," I said.

"But marriage is so terribly serious," pleaded Lady Ashdown. "If you're really . . ."

"If I weren't really in love with Anita, I shouldn't be asking her to marry me, should I?"

There was an unexpected pause; and I saw the Ashdowns looking guilty. Their manner implied more frankly than they dared say in words that they thought they were conferring an immense favour by allowing me to marry into their family. That was bad enough; but this same unexpected pause hinted that I did not care for Anita in herself, but had trapped her into a promise of marriage for my own social glorification.

"I can't give my assent to anything hasty or ill-considered," said Ashdown; and the phrase, so redolent of 1910 and of political controversies in which the moribund House of Lords posed as a democratic rampart against "hasty, ill-considered legislation", shewed me that Ashdown's mind, like his hereditary title and his feudal estate, his pretensions and his pride, belonged to another century.

I turned to Anita.

"Speaking for us both," I said, "I think two years quite unnecessary. If we're to marry at all, let's marry as soon as we can get the preliminaries settled. I decline to be accepted on sufferance or on probation. If we *are* engaged—and, with great respect, that's a thing that only Nita and I can decide—, I shall make the engagement public at once."

There was an uneasy stir; and Lord Ashdown half rose from his chair.

"Arthur, I really can't allow . . . I must protest . . ."

"I'm sorry, sir, but this is so important that I can't risk a misunderstanding by wrapping it up in diplomatic language. Anita's of age. If *she's* prepared to go through with it, I see no reason for mystery or delay. I'm not trying to stampede her. Perhaps it would be better, if I left you to talk things over for a few minutes . . ."

I took a heavy risk in bowing myself out of the room, for I had ruffled the family. The sense of the meeting was against me; and I had left Anita, who shewed at Medmenham that she could only exist on borrowed vitality, to fight single-handed. Yet, if I had stayed longer, I might have said something that would have ranged Anita with the family against me; and, while a small dose of directness (or, if you like, disrespect) acted on Lord Ashdown as a sedative, any severer treatment might have stimulated his dazed antagonism.

"The unburied dead!," I murmured to myself in the phrase coined by Doris, as I carried to the next room a vivid memory of ineffectual voices and perplexed faces.

I could not understand, I have never understood, how the English could forge ahead in some directions and, in others, remain rooted in the Middle Ages. This was a time when discovery and invention had given us wireless telegraphy, the aeroplane, anæsthetics and radium. Darwin had accustomed us to

biological evolution; and Frazer had applied the comparative method to the study of religion. We talked of democracy and universal franchise; and then we put a ring-fence round what was loosely called "progress". In some queer way the Ashdowns refused to see that "democracy" could or should even touch the social order; they would not admit that the twentieth century might demand in politics and society a change greater than any that had overtaken mechanics.

I have never called myself a politician, but I have sometimes been plunged in despair by the mental rigidity of people like the Ashdowns who could look back on history, admitting that Border castles, chain-armour, the unreformed church or the doctrine of divine right belonged to the past, but would never admit that the art of war, the forms of religion or the mode of government could require modification in their own day, in every day, and that, as the modern world moved more quickly, the modification must be greater. Lord Ashdown called himself a Conservative and detested Radicals, though he was reconciled to Bright, Cobden and the other great Liberals of his youth; Seymour called himself a Unionist and detested Labour, though he found excuses for such Radicals as Chamberlain, Dilke and Labouchere.

I wondered whether little John Canford, when his time arrived, would praise the Keir Hardies and Will Thornes of an earlier generation to the detriment of their successors! And would he, later still, when his daughter was of an age to marry, be

thinking in terms of an eighteenth-century aristocracy?

V

I DO not know how long I was by myself in the dining-room, but I remember staring out of window and finding my eyes suddenly covered by two soft hands.

"Father's sent me for you," whispered Anita.

"We've won?," I asked.

The grave grey eyes, shining with new fire, dropped before mine; the erect head slowly bowed till I could see only a cluster of auburn curls; the narrow white hands played nervously with a square of crumpled lace. Though I had kissed her two days before, when I had no right to call her mine, I could not kiss her now. In some way, the nearer she approached, the more intangible she became. I found myself wondering what I had done. For the first time I was afraid of her and afraid for her. If she had been under sentence of death, if she had taken vows of renunciation, she could not have given me a stronger impression of standing with only one foot in my world.

"*You* have," she answered. "I should have given in without you. These last two days . . . But don't overdo it."

"I'll be sweet reasonableness itself," I promised. "What d'you mean by saying that you'd have given in without me?"

"I *should* have."

"Is *that* all you care for me?"

"My darling, you know it isn't! But I could never marry against father's wishes."

"What nonsense!"

"But it's true, Arthur."

Some taint, then, from these unburied dead, I reflected as we went back together, had touched even the youth and independence—what Doris called the "stubbornness"—of my elusive Anita.

Lord Ashdown was at pains to shew that he was not yielding to bluster; and I gave him all the shadow of victory that he desired. The engagement was not to be announced, we were not to consider ourselves engaged until I had consulted my father. Was there any likelihood of his coming to Europe? In such matters correspondence was a difficult and unsatisfactory means of communication. I should have to think about (and, apparently, give guarantees for) my future movements, as it was not reasonable to expect Anita to uproot herself and live in America. These things, however, could be discussed at leisure when we met at Ashby Hall.

"Papa-in-law will be very dignified," said Doris, when the family council had dispersed. "He'll hate discussing money; he'll probably arrange to have everything left to your solicitor and his; and then he'll make a very hard bargain. I know these people! They're quite able to take care of themselves; and, though papa-in-law thinks it's undignified or criminal for me to accept a fur coat from 'the Baron', they'll galvanize the whole family fortunes out of their daughter's marriage settlement.

That's how the Undeserving Poor live. That's legitimate."

"My father has the reputation—in America—of being able to look after himself," I pointed out. "But what sort of settlement . . . ?"

"What does it matter?," she interrupted. "If it's big, they'll expect you to do so much more for them. If it's small,"—she laughed mirthlessly—"they'll come to me."

Doris was so inelastic and unhelpful that I let my own affairs slide.

"If it isn't a rude question," I said, "how are things looking?"

She shook her head and turned away.

"I'm worried out of my life," she whispered. "You know, Arthur, my *credit's* gone . ."

And then she broke down. The strain of years had left her unequal to the catastrophe of Pine-apple Reefs. Hitherto she had divided and ruled her creditors, introducing new customers, paying small sums on account and, in the last resort, mysteriously pacifying her tradesmen by increasing her indebtedness to them. Still crying too much to speak, she pulled out a drawer and pointed with trembling hand to a stack of bills, some of them not yet opened.

"I daren't!," she whispered. "I could scream every time the post comes . . ."

I opened them for her and made an abstract of her liabilities. The total left me breathless; but Doris looked as if a few more days of tension would send her out of her mind.

"I'll see what can be done," I said. "In the meantime don't worry."

Either she did not understand or could not believe that I should raise so big a sum, for she no longer protested against a loan or gift from me. I cabled to my father; and, by the time that we set out for Leicestershire, the Canford creditors stood to receive twenty shillings in the pound.

"Break it to them gently," I suggested, but Doris was not in spirits to laugh over her latest escape from bankruptcy.

And it is significant that I did not offer her any good advice. Before my cheque was paid in, she bought me a wrist watch—"to shew how I love you, how grateful I am to you"—and two dresses for Anita—"because they looked adorable and suited her so perfectly"—; and on our last night in London she had one of the old bridge-parties and was losing hand over fist when I left at half-past one.

Lord Ashdown had wondered for two days whether I was worthy to marry into his family. I wondered what my father would think of the family into which I was marrying. Correspondence might be a "difficult" mode of communication, but I could not feel that a personal encounter between the fathers of the high contracting parties would be any less "unsatisfactory".

CHAPTER SIX

The One Thing Unpardonable

"It doesn't matter a damn what we say, but we must all say the same thing."

Saying attributed to Lord Melbourne.

I

THOUGH I have boasted more than once of my independence as a boy, and of my detachment as a young man, I feel that, until my engagement, I was never more than a subordinate actor in some one else's drama. These scenes which I have tried to recapture from the years that brought me to manhood have been chosen with the sole end of presenting my own story; but, though I seem already to have introduced a wide variety of characters and to have arrayed them against a backcloth now of Lanesborough and now of Oxford, of London and of Leicestershire, they are pursuing their own pageant and I am at best a spectator who occasionally scrambles over the footlights and mingles with the crowd.

One may begin where one will. In the construction of my narrative or the preparation of my defence, I have given a thumb-nail picture of

" the Baron " as a typical figure in Doris Canford's world; I have sketched the squat, silent form of my father, puffing at his pipe in the lonely splendour of his New York home, all with an idea that these various personages and environments and episodes are essential to the proper understanding of what followed. Not otherwise can I tell my story for the enlightenment of those who have read only a single chapter; and that through a distorting lens.

Nevertheless, it has always been some one else's story hitherto. Even when I blundered into Chris Young's romance, I feel that he was the hero, I only the tool of an arbitrary providence. If anybody, in the days before my name was made notorious, had done me the honour to discuss me, I should have been dismissed in few words as a man whom one had known at school or at the university, a wealthy young American who was to be seen at most of the parties in London, a shadowy figure on the outskirts of Lady Canford's rather dubious menagerie; in short, a creature in some one else's dream. So, I think, it seemed at the time; so, assuredly, it has seemed in these last weeks when I have been trying to reconstruct my drama. Henceforward, however, I must dominate the theatre. On the day when Doris, opening on me the attack which she had twice launched unsuccessfully against Sir James Harborough, demanded if there was any reason why I should not devote myself to putting Ashby into repair, I feel that the entire stage on which I had hitherto

lurked in a corner was cleared and made over to me.

This is not to say that, in my new importance, I was ever allowed to grow presumptuous. My engagement to Anita Canford was short, but I had time to wonder more than once whether American women were put to school quite so summarily, when they aspired to marry English husbands, and, if so, why they tolerated it. A rebel or a republican might have felt that Lord Ashdown would have done well to swallow me with as little grimacing as possible. When not living as the guest of Doris, my future father-in-law was lingering at Ashby like a shrunken ghost, unable to occupy more than one wing of the house or to take the family plate out of the bank, incapable of repairing his minished fortunes or of realizing his assets and mulishly unwilling to let anybody undertake the task for him. In Hill Street and in Leicestershire at this time our conversation ran unendingly on the family finances; and, if there were few secrets to be imparted to the new-comer, I formed a clearer picture of Lord Ashdown's strength and weakness. Silently, for the most part, but not less fiercely for his silence, my father-in-law-presumptive hated the twentieth century, resented the nineteenth and regretted the eighteenth, cherishing a dignified attitude of undiscriminating disapproval towards Seymour for trying to earn a livelihood in commerce, towards Doris for her campaign of gilded mendicancy, and towards Anita for wanting to marry the son of a self-made American.

Poor Lord Ashdown! However much I suffered at his hands, I must always regard him with pity: exiled from an earlier century, he was living in a strange land, fighting a strange poverty and submitting to strange indignities, too old in mind at any time to overhaul his inheritance of ideas. With the pity is mingled ungrudging respect. When his patronage chafed me, I was tempted to remind him that my father was a rich man by his own genius and that, from the day when I became paymaster, the Canfords in three generations would not again have to think about money. It is a tribute to Lord Ashdown's personal dignity that I never dared assert myself. I did not know how to begin; I dreaded that hint of superciliousness which would tell me that in the newly enriched of America one must expect a certain lack of breeding. . . .

"There are one or two things," he was always saying, "which I think it important for you to know . . ."

And on that word I was initiated into the faded glories of his house and family as I had seen poor Jessie Harborough initiated years before when she was being marked down for the hand of Seymour. The Canfords of my generation were mercifully few; but between the sixteenth century and the twentieth the family had made its marriages over a wide field and I was expected to get by heart the tortuous ramifications that linked it distantly with Pooles and Hamelys, Wedderburns and Ramsdens, Careys and Giffard-Montagues. Leaving me

to digest the past at my leisure, Lord Ashdown spoke of the days to come and, naturalizing me in advance, talked of my taking my place in the life of my future country (This was on the day after I had heard Doris crying: "*Afford* it? My dear, have you any *conception* what his father's worth?"). He examined my record and connections, expressing himself pleased that I should be a member of Trent's and asking me what I thought of the Calendar Club ("Where we *want* new members, Arthur"). Adapting Dr. Johnson, he seemed handsomely prepared to admit that much might be made of an American, if he were caught young.

Patronized by him at one moment and flattered at another, lectured for most of the time and held at arm's length for all, welcomed back as a fifteen-year-old by Lady Ashdown, who began sentences with "We *never* thought, when you first came to us as a funny, shy little boy . . . ," bantered ponderously by Seymour, who reminded me every few minutes that, as the engagement had not been announced, I could still get out of it, I spent these days in a state bordering on delirium. Outside an old-fashioned comedy, nobody lived, talked or behaved like these Ashdowns. I did not wonder that Doris occasionally felt oppressed by the obsolete, starved grandeur of Ashby Hall, with its sixteenth-century patent of nobility and its flapping screen of ivy; I no longer resented her occasional impatience with the lord of Ashby Hall when he branded as undignified the shifts by which he was kept housed and fed by other people. And,

with my American upbringing, I echoed her every protest against the discomfort of the house.

"I'd give all the ancestors Seymour ever had for one good modern bathroom," she exclaimed one day.

"I'd take an option on the bathroom," I said, "and boil down the dead and the living, if I thought I could arrive at one male or female Canford who talked my language and saw life with my eyes."

II

THERE was a sensible clearing of the atmosphere when Chris Young arrived to end the family-councils.

With Lord Ashdown's permission I had told him of my engagement and invited him to be my best man. This office, he replied, he would be honoured to undertake if I could arrange to be married within the next fortnight; after that he was sailing with his regiment for India. Might he come to Ashby for eight-and-forty hours to wish us good luck and good-bye?

We went in a body to lay his request before Lady Ashdown; and, when the ancient one-horse brougham deposited at the front door a Chris Young who had aged uncommonly little since we came to spend our school holidays at Ashby, I feel that every one from Benjy Merton to Anita sighed with relief. Before dinner, indeed, Lord Ashdown was saying: "If they *do* decide to live here . . . "; during dinner he sounded me on politics if I *should* think of standing for the Market

Ashby division ; but at ten o'clock, when he retired to the library with a volume of Clarendon's *History*, the fog of solemnity lifted. Chris abandoned his discussion of servants' wages with Lady Ashdown ; Benjy, who paid dearly in boredom for so many years' free food and lodging, came into the small saloon like a boy released from school ; and, while he and Doris, Seymour and Chris played bridge, Anita and I were free to talk by ourselves.

Not for long were we allowed to enjoy even this modest relief. I do not know whether any one scented a modern impropriety in the fact of a man's sitting in the garden with the girl to whom he was engaged, but on the first evening Lord Ashdown, roused from the library by a murmur of voices, ordered Anita indoors before she caught cold ; on the second she said good-night to me in public and went upstairs with her mother.

" If I *weren't* leaving at the end of the week . . . ," I boasted to myself, transmuting into defiant speeches the anger which I felt against Lord Ashdown for his obsolete tyranny and against Anita for her subservience. " Anyway, when next I come here, it will be as her husband."

Looking back on these uneasy days and nights, I realize that the girl's habit of obedience was already troubling me. In Hill Street she had praised my courage in bearding the family ; and even now I wondered what kind of fight she would make if the Ashdowns, after unsatisfactory passages with my father, delayed to announce our engagement and ultimately worried her to end it. Over a gulf

of nearly ten years my mind leapt back to the day when Raymond and I were discussing Seymour's engagement to Doris; once again I saw Anita as a plump, red-haired child, with startled grey eyes, confessing in a whisper that she did not know how "See" *could* go against his father.

As we settled down to bridge, I tried to recover my temper and to diagnose Anita's strange tractability. Seymour, who was returning to work early next day, had already gone to bed; and I had been persuaded to partner Chris Young against Benjy Merton and Doris. I soon found that my play was hardly good enough to allow me leisure for psychological speculation. Benjy never made a mistake; Doris—I am told by those in a position to judge—made every mistake known to bridge and atoned for her impatient blundering with streaks of intuition which, on her good days, made her irresistible. This was one of her good days. Chris and I lost three big rubbers in succession; we cut again; and Benjy and I held our own. Then we went back to our first places and to a game in which all our kings were caught by her aces, all our finesses failed and all our long suits languished for want of a card of re-entry.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Chris at short intervals. "You'll give us our revenge? . . . This beats all records," he laughed uncomfortably a quarter of an hour afterwards. "You *must* give us a chance of winning it back."

As I play bridge only for the amusement of my friends, I looked pointedly at the clock when

midnight struck. By this time, however, Chris had lost more than forty pounds; and, with the others predicting that his luck must change soon, I did not feel justified in deserting him. We ceased cutting for partners; midnight became one; and the forty pounds rose in three rubbers to forty-seven, fifty and sixty-two. If Chris had been ten years younger, if I had been Benjy's age, I could have told him not to make a fool of himself; but Chris, by now a salted subaltern in a crack regiment, was old enough to resent being lectured, I was young enough to fear being thought a bad loser. Never have I enjoyed a game less! I saw him growing more and more white; and, when he declared on nothing more substantial than what he hoped—by home-made laws of compensation—to find in my hand, I fancied that he was losing his head. The only person who could stop the game was Benjy, for Doris shewed the haggard face and too bright eyes of the cataleptic gambler; and Benjy, who hated going to bed and was well supplied with whisky and cigars, could hardly be expected to cut short an evening that was highly profitable.

The end came fortuitously. As dummy, I stood up to stretch my legs and look at Doris' hand. She was strong in clubs and the two red suits; and I was on the point of going round to ascertain what spades her father held, when I discovered that I could already see without moving. We had opened the French windows nearest to the table; with a background of dark-red curtain, the middle

pane acted as a mirror and reflected every card on that side of the table.

That hand, unexpectedly won by my partner, was the last of the rubber; and I said, with a fair assumption of good-humoured fatigue, that nothing on earth would keep me up for another game. Chris was piteously divided between fear of going on and dread of leaving off. He had complained to me a day or two before that his Indian kit had cost four times what he expected; and I knew that, when he found himself in debt to Doris for seventy-six pounds, he could have paid seventy-six thousand with as much ease.

"I'll give you a cheque in the morning," he said; and his lips were so dry that he could hardly speak.

Forgetting Doris for the moment, almost forgetting to pay Benjy, I went with Chris to his room. He would have died rather than ask for help; and I must therefore offer help that could not be refused. Though we had drifted apart, he was my oldest and still my most intimate friend.

"Rather an expensive night," I said, as I filled a pipe. "It occurred to me that, as you're just off to India, you may not want to draw your balance down too low . . ."

"Balance!," Chris echoed to the coat he was folding.

"Well, will you let me settle with Doris?," I asked boldly. "Pay me back when it suits you."

Chris spun round like a condemned man at the whisper of a reprieve.

"I can't do that," he protested.

"Don't talk rot!," I said. "Post-date your cheque two days; and I'll give you one here and now. They're a strong combination, Benjy and Doris."

"They've forgotten more than I ever knew," Chris answered.

He, then, had neither seen nor suspected the window mirror; and I could now begin to think of Doris. I signed my cheque with a firm hand; and Chris did the same, though it was two o'clock in the morning and we were aching with fatigue.

"I'll give it to her," I said. As he tried to mumble a word of thanks and gave it up to continue his undressing, I wrote: "*Do not present this for three days.*" Then I added: "*If you feel justified in presenting it at all.*" Having gone so far, I could not stop there; and I began to see Doris dispassionately. It was chance that I had found her victimizing Chris, but I should not always be at hand to intervene. Curiously enough, I felt no antipathy towards her; I cared less for the fate of her future victims than for her own risk of being discovered (and I wondered how often she had played this trick before). "*I must talk to you to-morrow alone,*" I wrote. Then I pocketed cheque and note. "Good-night, Chris," I said.

Of necessity, I have thought many times of this note in the last fifteen years. More than anything else, it was the turning-point in my life; with greater certainty than of any other event I can say that, if I had refrained from writing it, I should not now be composing my defence in exile. Why,

then, did I write it? On some forgotten occasion I put my problem of this night as a hypothetical case and asked Humfrey Barlow what the unwilling spectator should have done. "Nothing," he said; "there was no proof." "If," I persisted, "you felt *morally* sure?" "I should still do nothing." "You wouldn't warn the woman, for her own good, or to protect your friend?" "I've been most varieties of fool in my time, but not *that*," he laughed. Well, I suppose I was a fool; and it is more important now to record what I did than why I did it. Nevertheless, if I were defending myself, I should say that I could not possibly have followed Barlow's facile and rather cowardly advice: at the risk of compounding a deed of dishonour I had to save Doris from herself and, though Chris Young was unlikely to be matched against her in the future, I had to strike a blow for the man who had come awkwardly to my rooms five years before to ask me huskily if our passing estrangement had affected our friendship.

It was a quarter-past two when I pushed the envelope under Doris's door. At half-past, when I was finishing my pipe in bed, I heard a whistle, followed by Doris's voice.

"Arthur? Are you asleep yet? I want to speak to you. I don't understand this at all . . ."

III

WHEN Doris came into my room, with her hair floating loose over a grey silk tea-gown and her

bare feet thrust into down-trodden moccasins, I was caught unprepared.

For half-an-hour I had assumed that she was cheating; cheating at cards; the one thing unpardonable in England, where a man was still received after neglecting his children and stealing his friend's wife and leaving his tradesmen unpaid and defrauding the public as (I maintain) "the Baron" defrauded the public by forcing up the price of Pineapple Reef shares. Little as I owed to my father's moral training, I had learned from him that there was only a false glory in a man's going bankrupt for a vast sum or in his breaking up some one else's life, but I found among my associates in these years a queer, almost admiring attitude of mind which expressed itself in the phrase that a man was "successful with women" or that he had "made a fine art of being in debt". No one, however, jested about card-sharping; and it was this ultimate infamy at which I was hinting. My note was a challenge and a threat. Nevertheless, when I saw Doris fingering the cheque and frowning in faint wonder, I realized that I had no case. She had not arranged the mirror, I had not seen her use it; and, because a temperamental player had shewn—at times only; not when she was partnered by me—the divination which marks the genius at bridge, I had assumed that a woman whom I had adored since I was a small boy was guilty of something which would cause her to be drummed out of honourable society the world over.

"What don't you understand?," I asked.

"Your note," she answered, not giving herself away by a hair's breadth.

I kept my finger ostentatiously in my book; ostentatiously I looked at the travelling clock by my bed, marvelling at my own recklessness in bluffing such an antagonist. Were Doris innocent, my atrocious charge would end our friendship and perhaps my place in that house and my engagement to Anita; if she were guilty, she would also be clever enough not to walk into a trap.

"It's simple enough, isn't it?," I asked.

She sat on the edge of my bed and turned the paper towards the candle.

"'*If you feel justified . . .*'," she read. "'*I must talk to you to-morrow alone.*' What does it mean?"

An avenue of escape was suddenly revealed to me.

"You know as well as I do," I said with a craven show of vehemence, "that Chris can't afford to lose sums like that."

"Then he shouldn't play. He's not a child." Doris tore the cheque in two and set light to it in the flame of the candle. "*That's* soon settled."

Her impulsive movement might have been prompted by generosity wholly consistent with her character; but I was full enough of suspicion to feel that her act betrayed a woman who was hiding the traces of her crime. Her tone, as she said: "*That's* soon settled" suggested that something still to "settle" had not been said. Most significant

of all, though the cheque was now but a smear of black ash in the candle-stick, Doris continued to sit on my bed.

Neither of us wanted to break the silence, but after a few moments' aimless staring at the candle she turned to me and immediately looked away again. I recall a strange, unhappy feeling that *I* was the culprit and that she had caught me red-handed.

"You said you wanted to talk to me . . . alone," she muttered.

"It was on the general subject of cards," I answered.

Doris nodded at the candle; but her eyes were steady and the outline of her mouth was unchanged.

"What about it?," she asked.

"People were beginning to call Pen Place a gambling-hell," I said, still hoping to let her off with a charge of rapacity. "You'll get a very bad name, Doris, if you go on playing as you did to-night."

"Oh!"

I looked for a change, but there was none to see; and I no longer felt the culprit. For some reason which I cannot understand, the more innocent she seemed, the more I suspected her; and, the more I wrestled, hot-faced, with my own suspicions, the more I wanted to entrap her.

"If you take money off people who can't afford to lose . . ."

"Then he shouldn't play," she repeated. "He's not a boy; and it isn't as if he were a beginner."

" You and your father were too strong a combination."

I did not consciously put into my tone any other significance than the words would naturally bear, but Doris turned on me.

" What d'you mean ?," she asked ; and, as she spoke, I could see her already regretting her precipitate, eager shrillness.

" My God ! Doris !," I cried.

For a few moments she blustered ; but I said nothing, I *could* say nothing ; and at the end she asked with a dry calm :

" Well, what are you going to do ? "

It is curious to remember that I had brought no accusation.

" You must never play again," I said, staring at the sheet, because I could not face her eyes. " Any excuse you like. Say you've been losing too much money . . . "

" Are you going to tell Seymour ?," she interrupted.

" If you ever play again, I'll tell the whole world," I answered roughly. Then I was overmastered by her blank, helpless resignation. " God's name, Doris !," I cried, " why did you do it ? "

" I never *did* . . . till to-night," she whispered ; and I believe that she was speaking the truth. " I was . . . I suppose I was mad. I said to myself, in the first hand of all, ' If only he's covered in clubs . . . ' And I looked up ; and he *was !* I couldn't understand at first. For a moment . . . Then I saw that it made all the difference. I

wanted money so *desperately*. I went on. . . . I could have killed you when we cut again and you took father's chair. . . . You hid your cards in your lap, I nearly told you that it wasn't playing the game." . . . She laughed hysterically; and her eyes narrowed to a slit of burning colour. "What are you going to do?," she asked again.

Our excitement and fatigue shewed themselves in alternating monologues which refused to interlock.

"You could have come to me," I cried. "You know I'd do anything for you. Doris, it's *dirty*!"

"I told you my credit was gone, didn't I?," she asked with an effort of memory. "That cheque . . . The one *you* gave me . . . I've been paying 'debts of honour'. It was awful! That little cad Silverdale said: 'It's all right playing with Lady Canford so long as she's *winning* . . . ' Nice, isn't it? I've cleared them, but the others won't leave me alone. I've sold everything. And I got a letter this morning . . . I'd have robbed the poor-box of a church!"

In another moment Doris would have lost control of herself; the fear of this steadied me. I begged her—in that dreadful novelistic phrase—to let me be her banker; in another phrase as bad, I insisted that she must take from me whatever money she wanted and repay me "when her ship came home". . . .

"Why are you doing this?," Doris demanded suddenly, projecting her monologue at a tangent.

"Because I love you, I suppose."

She shivered and looked round the room, as a

gust of wind depressed the candle-flame into a horizontal spear of light.

"Did I leave the door open? . . . I'm not worth it, Arthur. I don't deserve anybody's love. Seymour's been so good to me, he believes in me; if he ever found out, I honestly think it would kill him. . . . Swear you'll never let him suspect, Arthur!"

"If you play fair by me, I'll play fair by you."

"It'd kill poor papa-in-law, too. I feel such a wretched little mongrel beside him. . . . But I warned you. D'you remember the first time I came to your room? This very room? You were sick with love for me. And I took you in my arms and laid your head against my breast. . . . And I could have killed myself for making you unhappy. But I told you then that I wasn't worth bothering about, that you'd wake up one fine day and find out the kind of woman I was. . . . I *must* shut that door."

As she crossed the room, my memory sprang back to that first night when she came to tell me that she had promised to marry Seymour. There was the same faded paper on the walls, the same rickety chairs and tables, the same tattered chintz curtains. The same vast, shapeless forms leaped and dodged across wall and ceiling at the flicker of the candle's flame. And Doris herself, bare-armed and strangely young, though her face was white and her eyes tortured, had not changed.

"I'm rotten . . . right through," she whispered. "You idealize women! That's why I never told

you. In Hill Street, when you offered to pay all my debts. I *couldn't* tell you! You'd have despised me so. Dear heart, your cheque—that enormous cheque!—didn't cover a third . . . I've been afraid to tell any one."

"Is it going to make any difference, Doris?," I asked.

"Oh, my dear! I *swear* it will!"

IV

It was after three when she left me.

I was hot of head and cold of body so that I shivered like a man in palsy. Already a blue-grey sheen was stealing round the edges of the curtains; and, abandoning sleep, I put on flannels and crept downstairs into the garden. The ice-cold dew of early morning, the long shadows and the stinging scent of stocks started another train of thought; and I recalled the dawn when Chris Young's fickle first love had summoned me to walk with her in that Hampshire rose-garden overlooking Southampton Water. For any share in his little tragedy I felt that I had made reparation to Chris. . . .

I wondered what had happened to the girl; by some trick of memory, her name and face had vanished, but I could see again the drab dark stain of moisture which the wet grass sent creeping up her buckskin shoes. I wondered, too, whether Chris ever thought of her now and whether I should recover as quickly from a heart-wound if my betrothed jilted me. I gathered a handful of roses to lay by Anita's plate at breakfast; and instantly

I found myself visualizing the vast, cheerless dining-room and wondering whether Doris would come down to breakfast. The only thing that mattered was that we should both honour the amnesty and meet without embarrassment.

A crunch on the gravel made me turn with a start; and I was dumbfoundered to see Lord Ashdown behind me. He was in evening clothes, with a shabby, discoloured dinner-jacket partly hiding a grey blur where he had rubbed cigar-ash into his shirt-front. With one finger he kept his place in a calf-bound volume of Clarendon's *History*; and my mind, recoiling from the major surprise of finding him there at all, was fascinated to see that his unshaven chin was covered with red stubble. Before he went grey, then, he must have had auburn hair like Anita; absurdly I had always imagined him born grey and whiskered.

"Come into the library," he said, before I could make my surprise articulate.

Half-unconsciously he looked up to the blinded, silent windows which pierced with unseeing eyes the gently swaying screen of loose ivy. He too, I surmised, had been restless and was ready for a talk, but we could not raise our voices above a whisper on the terrace without disturbing Lady Ashdown.

"I didn't know you were a bad sleeper, sir," I said, as he sat down to his writing-table and motioned me to a chair.

"I was going to bed," he began, curiously like a man giving evidence in a police-court. "It was

later than my usual time. I'd been reading; and I wanted to finish the chapter. I heard voices . . . I should say here that I went to my room by the side staircase. Voices from your room. The door was ajar. I should have thought nothing, I should have gone on . . . It was my daughter-in-law's voice . . ."

I felt—perhaps rashly—that it was time to interrupt. Until that moment it had not occurred to me that young women ought—strictly speaking—not to sit talking on the edge of young men's beds at half-past two in the morning. We had been too much engrossed in what—God forgive me!—I thought a matter of greater concern.

"Rather an awkward point arose over the bridge last night," I explained. "The cards were dead against Chris; and he lost rather a lot of money. Doris, of course, couldn't take it, but, as you can imagine, it's not easy to refuse without hurting a man's feelings. However, we fixed it up satisfactorily, I'm glad to say."

Lord Ashdown treated my interruption as though he had not heard more than some insistent noise that had to spend itself.

"It was a quarter to three when I left this room," he went on in his police-court manner. "I looked at the time. . . . I shouldn't have thought twice, but the voice . . . I heard certain words . . ."

I tried to interrupt; but, though I made him pause, I did not know what I was trying to say.

"I heard—I think I recall the actual words—," he resumed; "'I don't deserve anybody's love.

Seymour's been so good to me, he believes in me; if he ever found out, I honestly think it would kill him . . .' Then one of you discovered the door was open . . . and shut it. I thought of forcing my way in. Then I felt that I must have time to think this over . . . in all its bearings. You must leave the house immediately."

"Lord Ashdown!," I cried. "Will you . . .?"

As I paused again, he looked up patiently.

"I thought it all over," he went on, as though he were talking to himself. For the first time I noticed that he was speaking with physical difficulty, as though his teeth were chewing the lips on one side of his mouth. His lined face, though I gave it little thought at the moment, was curiously puckered.

"I ask for no explanation, I offer no criticism. The least you can do, I think, is to keep away from England . . ."

"Lord Ashdown!," I cried again. "On my honour . . ."

"Bah!," he ejaculated, as though he were spitting something from his mouth.

"On my honour!," I repeated. "You don't *really* think . . . I swear to you that Doris came to me as I've told you, *simply* to discuss a point that had arisen at bridge! You *must* believe this, sir! I asked her to come . . . At least, I said I wanted to talk to her alone. *Do* you believe me?"

With him now, as with Doris before, our attack and defence dropped into parallel monologues.

"At three o'clock in the morning . . .," mur-

mured Lord Ashdown. "You invite me to believe . . . And I saw her going back to her room. My own house . . . My own son's wife . . . And it's less than a fortnight since you came to me for Nita; all you asked was the privilege of making her *happy*," he added with as near an approach to a sneer as I had ever heard from his closely-reined mouth.

"We've been through this before, sir," I interrupted. "I had to tell you then that your suspicions were fantastic . . ."

"My daughter-in-law had to spend an hour in your room at three o'clock in the morning to settle a bridge dispute?"

"It wasn't an ordinary bridge dispute."

"Evidently."

At that I flung to the winds nine-tenths of any loyalty that I felt towards Doris.

"I wanted to see her this *morning*," I cried. "*I* didn't want her to come then. It was . . . She felt it was a matter of life and death."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

His courteously patient manner was harder to bear down than any violence or sarcasm. I stammered; and the first truncated word opened a sentence which would have told him that Doris, his son's wife, came to beg me not to expose her for cheating at cards. I thank God humbly for the stammer, the choke, the fluttering shred of devotion that strangled my speech.

"I've put it as clearly as I could," I answered. "The issue's quite plain, sir. You know Doris,

you know me; you've known us for a good many years. I ask you, sir, with great respect, to use your imagination. I'm devoted to Doris, but only as I might be devoted to my sister, if I had one. I'm engaged to Anita; in two, three months' time . . . Is it *likely*? I hope I'm not mad, but such a suggestion . . ."

"I have asked for no explanation, I offer no criticism," Lord Ashdown repeated.

"But, good God, what d'you take me for?"

He looked me up and down, like a dealer judging a horse, patiently, dispassionately. Returning the stare, I saw again the grey streak of crushed cigar-ash on his shirt-front, the red stubble on his thin cheeks; I wondered again that his dignity over-mastered the comic touch of disreputability. He was incredibly suave. . . . Suddenly he rose to his feet and paced to the end of the library, with his chin on his chest and his fingers gripped white about a round ebony ruler.

"What do I take you for?," he asked. And it was only when he ceased to be suave that I guessed at the effort whereby he had held himself in check. "I take you for a liar . . ." I bowed. "A profligate," he added. There was more to come; and I watched spell-bound as he paced the length of the library again, working to his climax, shuffling and discarding the inadequacies of invective. "And a *cad*," he ended, so low that I hardly heard him. "A *cad!*," he repeated, that I should not remain in doubt.

V

For more than ten years I do not suppose that many nights have passed without my living again in imagination through the early morning hours of that day. The memory of it haunts my soundest sleep; with Kipling's *Broken Men*,

> *"We know there's something waiting;*
> *And we meet it when we wake."*

Daring are the strokes, brilliant the flights of rhetoric by which I might have overcome my antagonist! Yet what in fact happened was neither brilliant nor daring. I called upon Lord Ashdown to withdraw what he had said; he raised one hand and refused to argue with me. For nearly an hour we sat without speaking. At half-past six a gardener passed by the library window; and Lord Ashdown ordered the dog-cart to be made ready.

"You would like to change," he said icily, with half a glance at my flannels.

"I'm not going to be turned out of the house like this," I said.

"I have to ask you to curtail your visit," he answered; and this was the first of his phrases to strike me as stilted.

"I must see Anita first. *She*'ll understand," I said.

"I forbid it."

"You may forbid . . ." (I nearly said, "You may forbid till you're blue in the face"!) "I've a *right* to see her."

And at this least expected moment Anita entered the library in a white blanket-coat and bedroom slippers.

"You!," she cried. "I heard voices . . ."

Then she caught sight of her father's clothes and stopped.

"Will you come back presently, my dear?," said Lord Ashdown gently.

"Nita, stay here! For the love of God, stay here!," I cried.

She looked from the one to the other in bewilderment.

"Anita!," said her father, with authority in his voice.

"I beg you to stay! It's everything in the world to us both!"

I started towards her, but Lord Ashdown barred my way.

"Anita!," he said again, over one shoulder.

She stared at me with frightened eyes, clasped her hands and then suddenly grew limp. I saw her fingers feeling for the door-handle. Her head drooped and turned. In another moment she was gone.

"You would like to change," Lord Ashdown repeated; and I walked upstairs like a dazed animal.

It was to keep me from following Anita, I suppose, that he came up with me; but I was in no condition to make a bolt. To this day I remember how I clutched at his arm; nor have I forgotten that he supported me as though I were a rag-covered tramp.

Some time later I was sitting on a bench at Leicester station. I reached my rooms in Duke Street and surprised my man by calling for champagne. With a plate of sandwiches on the one side of the table and a bottle on the other I began my letter of explanation. It was written with one eye on Anita and the other on her father. She *must* see, I pleaded, that there was nothing criminal in my relations with Doris. I rehearsed the luckless meeting in my rooms and her father's lecture next day; I described my last interview that morning and threw myself on her mercy and understanding. Lord Ashdown's suspicions were so grotesque that, if we had not both been up all night and nervously overwrought, he would not have had the audacity —or the lack of humour—to formulate them. I could see now that he based himself on a few phrases, overheard and misunderstood, which I was not in a position to explain. "*I don't deserve anybody's love. Seymour's been so good to me, he believes in me; if he ever found out, I honestly think it would kill him . . .*" This, I explained without departing unduly far from the truth, was simply a reference to Doris's financial difficulties.

"*As I asked your father,*" I ended my letter, "*is it* likely—*unless he writes me down a brute-beast? You know me well enough, Anita. You're the only person who can convince him. At present he won't believe a word I say; he told me to my face that I was a liar, a profligate, and a cad . . .*"

I have hardly any recollection how I spent the day and a half that had to pass before I could hope

for an answer. Some one came to see me; I believe it was Humfrey Barlow, but I have never had the heart to ask him. I dined with our ambassador; and half-way through dinner he thought that I was ill and sent me back to my rooms in charge of a secretary. After that I stayed at home most of the time, though I must have wandered forth once, for I was nearly killed by a taxi which swept round some corner and ripped my overcoat with the point of its wing. After the first twenty-four hours I beat a path from my sofa to the front door and tramped backwards and forwards, waiting for the rustle of letters. I stood staring at the wire cage as though by force of will I could compel an exculpation from Anita to drop into it.

On the second morning I received an envelope with the Ashby postmark. I assumed, with a sinking heart, that it must be from Lord Ashdown, as I had looked in vain for Anita's writing. Ripping it open, I found my own letter, still sealed and returned to me without comment. I stared stupidly and carried it back to my sitting-room. Anita would not have done such a thing on her own initiative; and Lord Ashdown, who did not know my writing, could only intercept my letters if he unlocked the post-bag himself and told Anita to pick them out for him . . . and if she obeyed.

I opened my letter and read it with disgust. When next I saw Anita, I wanted to say, "*It wouldn't have harmed you to read this; it shewed in every line that I trusted to your understanding and that, when I wrote it, I imagined you at least wouldn't let*

me down." She lacked courage to fight for me against her father's foul suspicion. My orgy of bitterness only passed when I tried to guess what iron discipline Lord Ashdown exercised over his daughter. With a shock I remembered again Anita's telling me that, though she was of age, she could not marry against her father's wishes. . . .

My pride was too roughly handled in those days for me to be sensitive about it now. I wrote to Lord Ashdown arrogantly and then abjectly. I wrote to Doris and enclosed a letter, which was returned like the first with a pencilled scrawl; "*It's no good. He's made her promise not to hold any communication with you. I'm heart-broken! I'm doing my best, but you must be patient.*" . . . And then I went to Leicester and toiled on foot to Ashby; and the lodge-keeper's wife came out, blushing and drying her hands on her apron, to say:

"His lordship gave orders that we wasn't to admit you, sir."

After all these years I have every reason to be philosophical, but I find it hard to forgive Lord Ashdown that last indignity. When my memory goes back to that week of endless days, I hurry over my repulse from the outer gates of Ashby Hall. I still find myself flushing. I still recall my mood as I walked back to Leicester.

Doris at least had not declared war on me; and I wrote, begging her to see me. Her reply, which took four days to reach me, was postmarked "*Nottingham*", unsigned and written in a disguised

hand, making an appointment for the following day at the Great Central Hotel.

"Papa-in-law's quite equal to having me shadowed," she began, making for a corner table. "He's been watching me, on and off, for years; it isn't mere chance that you and I have been caught out so often. Arthur, it's awful! I don't know what he said to *you* . . . I always thought I could twist him round my finger. D'you realize that, if I compromise myself by a hair's breadth, I shall find myself in the Divorce Court? With you as co-respondent? You mustn't write to me any more. He hasn't told Seymour . . . yet, because he can't make up his mind to face the scandal; but he's itching to . . ."

She broke off as a waiter approached to take my order for tea.

"If he's not told him yet, he won't tell him," I said. "But what about *me*, Doris?"

"I don't know what he said to Nita," she murmured, but I felt that this was avoiding the point.

"Oh, no doubt that I'm not a fit person to marry her."

Doris raised her veil cautiously and began to pour out tea, still studiously dawdling on the fringe of my problem.

"In time . . . ," she suggested diffidently.

"Time by itself won't make him think better of me."

I dared go no farther: it was for Doris to make the next move. We stirred our tea and played

at eating, while a wordless dialogue passed between us.

"He wouldn't believe it, you know," Doris sighed. "He'd say we *must* be guilty, if I sheltered myself behind such an explanation."

"He'd know you wouldn't *invent* such an excuse."

Doris stared in front of her for some moments; then she turned to me:

"Do you *want* me to tell him?"

I suppose it was a fair question, as I had shewn her plainly that her security was being bought by my exclusion from Ashby Hall.

"What else . . . ?," I mumbled.

"I *shan't*," said Doris.

"Well, you know *I* can't."

I have wondered a thousand times whether I answered rightly. I had given her a solemn promise, but I owed obligation to Anita also. Dimly I imagined that there must be some other escape; in those days I believed neither in the permanence of Lord Ashdown's resentment nor in the patience of Anita's submission.

For a moment Doris allowed her expression to relax; but, when our eyes met, she made haste to drive away all sign of relief.

"I'll give you back your promise," she said; and I thought I heard a taunt in her voice.

"When I give my word, I try to keep it," I said stiffly.

We lapsed into silence, until the waiter returned to take our tray. Then Doris looked at her watch and said that she must be going.

"What line does Seymour take?," I asked.

"I don't know what's been told him. He's just what he always was to me. He came home the week-end after you'd left. Papa-in-law talked to him; then he went off to see Nita. When he came into my room, the one thing he said was 'We must forget this and help *her* to forget it.' *What* we're to forget I don't know, but I seem to have been left out of it. I daren't discuss it with any one. Even Nita . . . When I took your letter to her, she just said: 'I've promised father not to communicate with him in any way.' I screwed up my courage and asked what had happened. She only said: 'I can't talk about it.'"

And with that we parted. Three days later I sailed for America. My father was quick to see that I had something on my mind; but, as I could give neither names nor details, his advice was only that I should wait till "these people" came to their senses. I stayed in New York until the following spring, when I returned to England. At almost the first party that I attended in London, I caught sight of Anita, who flushed, hesitated and bowed without speaking. I tried to reach her, but there was a sundering human flood between us; and, when I penetrated to her side of the room, she was gone. A week later I met Doris and was told that the family had returned to Leicestershire.

"I'll see you through, if you'll give me time," she said again.

And that was the only hope and consolation that I had to bear me through the years that

followed. On Anita's birthday and at Christmas I sent her a telegram of good wishes; there was never a reply, I did not even know whether they reached her. I made, I think, three attempts to get into direct communication with Lord Ashdown; he returned my two letters and, when I met him in the street, told me that he had a pressing engagement and could not stay. . . .

CHAPTER SEVEN

My Last Homage

"O lands are lost and life's losing,
And what were they to gie?
Fu' mony a man gives all he can,
But nae man else gives ye."
A. C. SWINBURNE: *A Jacobite's Farewell.*

I

I HAVE suspended work for some days now in an effort to separate the emotions of the time when I was turned out of Ashby Hall, like a detected thief not worth the squalor of prosecution, from other emotions induced by later knowledge.

I know now, as I only realized very slowly then, that Lord Ashdown intended his ban of excommunication to be irrevocable; I know now that my frantic faith in the mercurial and preoccupied Doris was misplaced. I know now that Anita's mind was made up for her in a way on the day when her father proclaimed that she must never think of me again, that she would not wish to think of me, if she knew what he could tell her, and that he was sparing her, in so far as she could be spared, by not telling her. In novels and plays

we are taught to think poorly of girls who hesitate to defy their parents, but in life the habit of obedience may be gauged by the rarity of these gallant gestures. Most girls, I believe, in the relatively tractable days before the war, would have submitted to a father who had been stricken in brain and speech by the shock of their lover's infamy; and, in trusting to time and to Doris Canford's magic in getting her own way, I realize that I understood the Ashdowns as little as she. When she swept like a tornado into their placid midst and swept them aloft in the gale of insistent personality, she believed and said that she was overwhelming a family that was docile and invertebrate from inbreeding. We lived to see our mistake. Their sheltered life among people of their own kind, innocent of effort and aloof from competition, made them unready to resist the quick, audacious vitality of Doris; but every concession that they made on inessentials stiffened their defence of the essentials. Had Doris been a Catholic, Seymour would not have married her; if she had been caught unfaithful, he would have divorced her. Coaxing and intriguing left them unmoved, as my patience and constancy left Anita unmoved when she was ordered to submit. If this was the feebleness of inbreeding, I despair of accounting for the stubborn fidelity of a spirit that loved where it had sworn to love, though it obeyed where it had been trained to obey. Nothing that I had done could kill Anita's devotion; though it might keep me from marrying her, she would marry no one

else while my shadow lay across her life. This was to be revealed gradually to me over a period of ten years and more.

I have been trying, at the same time, to disengage the figure which I cut in my own eyes from any that I may present to a romantic reader. The man falsely accused, the man paying the penalty of another's dishonour, the broken-hearted outcast; I was none of these. Through the dull years of aching futility that were at least interrupted by the war, I see myself as a young man dazed and embittered, restless and angry, helpless and then hopeless, finally a man no longer young. It was in 1910 that my engagement began and ended. I was twenty-six, Anita twenty-one. I suppose Lord Ashdown was nearing seventy; and perhaps I imagined that he had not many more years to live. Doris was thirty, Seymour a trifle older. Lady Ashdown and Benjy were, I believe, the same age, about eight-and-fifty, though the one was prematurely worn-out with small, domestic worries and the other with indulgence. I set down this date, these ages, to explain the mood of desperation that crept over us with the passing years. The curtain was rung down on our tragedy when Anita and I were in our prime. When next I had speech with her, I felt that I was talking to some one whose youth had been stripped from her as she passed into the shadowed silence of prison. Her face had by then lost its soft roundness; and the auburn of her glorious hair was flecked with grey. The woman whose image had obsessed me

for half my life returned as a stranger whom I had known in childhood and for a moment in maturity, with a mind that I understood less well than that of my monosyllabic valet.

So far as I am aware, my brief engagement was not known or suspected by any but the family, including for this purpose Benjy Merton, and Chris Young, who went abroad immediately. There were two general elections in 1910; King Edward died in May; and I gathered from the letters which I received in New York that every one was too much engrossed in the coming coronation to spare a thought for me. I was still waiting vaguely for "these people" to "come to their senses", when my father died suddenly, leaving the whole of his fortune to me. In a spirit that was half bribe, half threat, I sent an ultimatum to Doris:

"One of the questions I have to decide is whether to stay here or come back to Europe. On this subject I have a right to insist on a plain answer from Lord Ashdown. Until Anita tells me that she no longer wants to marry me, I shall continue to regard myself as engaged to her. If she tells me that she no longer wants to marry me, I have at least a right to know what I have done to change her feelings."

My ultimatum was successful in drawing a definite reply, but it was hardly the reply that I wanted.

"*I gave your message,*" wrote Doris. "*Nita refused even to hear it without her father's leave* (*she has the moral strictness of a nun*); *and, when I'd*

quoted it in your own words, she said without prompting: 'Will you tell him that he must regard the engagement as at an end?' I don't know whether she still cares for you. I don't know whether she's simply afraid of giving papa-in-law another stroke. I don't despair easily; but, if I'm right in thinking it's hopeless, I beg you to realize it at once. Work, travel (I'm going to be horribly brutal), look for some one else. I know I'm responsible, but anything I said would only ruin me without helping you."

This letter made me feel for the first time that I did not want to marry Anita. The excitement of being engaged, the shock of having the engagement broken off, the torturing week when I wrote and waited, wrote and waited, re-enacting and brooding over the scenes at Ashby Hall, had exhausted me. For months I had told myself that *to-day* I should hear from Anita, *to-day* the scales would fall from her father's eyes. I was almost relieved when Doris told me to abandon hope.

It was one thing, though, to learn that I was free and another to find uses for my freedom. America was by now a foreign country to me; and, after I had spent six months in winding up my father's estate, I sold his house on Fifth Avenue and wandered without aim for more than two years. As a distraction, my wanderings were only moderately successful. Indeed, one day, one day only in twenty-four months of wandering, deserves a few lines of description. Finding myself at

Colon twelve days in advance of the ship that was to take me on, I decided to visit the Floral Islands. On the elderly paddle-boat that plied weekly between Panama and San Agostino I encountered the advance agents of an American syndicate that was negotiating for an oil-and-copra concession from the British Government; and an absurd, boyish idea that it would be amusing for me to have an island all my own led me to seek a concession on my own account. When I returned to Colon I was tenant of His Majesty King George the Fifth's Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty for a strip of sand five miles long by three across, with a natural bathing-beach, a few acres of palm-trees, a derelict sugar-plantation and an overseer's house which I could convert to my own uses for a small expenditure. In the course of the next ten or twelve years I lent my little island more than once to romantic travellers; and, though I never lived there myself, I was superstitiously unwilling to part with it.

"Some day," I told my friends, "I may need it."

When at last I returned to England in the spring of 1913, it was for no better reason than that I had been infected with home-sickness by the eager plan-making of a group in the Hong-Kong club. If not cured, I was at least bored beyond bearing; and I could always set out again if London proved too small for me. Returning to the old Duke Street rooms, I amused myself by studying the new position which I had been accorded. To the

eyes of vulgar readers, I had ceased to be "a friend" in the defamatory photographs of "*Lady X—and a Friend in the Row*"; soon I was to be "*Mr. Arnold* (or "*Albert*"; sometimes even, by a lapse into accuracy, "*Arthur*") *Weston*" in pictures of "*Lady X—and Mr. A. Weston*"; ultimately I became the "*Mr. Weston*" of "*Mr. Weston and a Friend*". My father's death, indeed, made of me such a target that my trunks were not unpacked before one impoverished duchess offered me a lease of her castle in Scotland, while another professed readiness to run me as a social speculation, introducing me to the "right" people, securing me invitations to the "right" houses and ultimately accommodating me with the "right" wife.

"Are Abana and Pharpar no longer flowing?," I asked Humfrey Barlow, who was regaling me with news of my friends. "When I want to be floated, I shall certainly go to Doris."

"The Canfords have rather dropped out," he answered. "After all, if you shew a cat the way to the dairy . . ."

From his subsequent confidences I gathered that Sir James Harborough in Carlton House Terrace, "the Baron" in Eaton Square, and M. de Nevers in Knightsbridge, had by now been trained to a habit of promiscuous hospitality which enabled those who had hitherto depended for "a good time" on an introduction from Doris to help themselves without her aid.

"You provide the money, these gay young

things spend it," Barlow explained. "That requires less of an effort than spending it yourself."

Without examining the new generation at first hand, I was quite sure that I preferred my unobserved niche in Duke Street. Any one who was at all in London during the two years before the war will remember the shameless exploitation and crazy extravagance of the time. They formed the subject of contemporary denunciation from pulpit and press; and they have been made an episode in most of the novels that treat of the transition from peace to war, though the women and men who are now between twenty and thirty must think that we made a great to-do about pre-war licence. The audacity of one generation is liable to seem woefully commonplace to the next; and I should not swell the record of this period by a line if I did not feel that the novelists had described it too much from the outside.

I was not only in the thick of the spoliation; I was one of the people most assiduously despoiled. A bachelor, an American, a man whose native angles had been smoothed by the fortunate circumstance of education at an English public-school and university, I may assert without boastfulness that I was in all ways a pleasanter victim than Harborough, whose manner was no more winning that his appearance, or da Ricci, who in spite of his looks and suavity was not a man to be lightly put up for one's club or gladly welcomed into one's family. Without prejudices of my own against

Jews or Portuguese, but with lively recollections of conventional English sneers at "Semites" and "Dagoes", I was interested to observe the great English houses, Catholic and Protestant alike, abasing themselves before this young man. Dark, slender and womanly, with melting, expressionless eyes, he reminded me of a deer at bay, with hounds surging shoulder-high around him.

"There," I said, "but for the grace of God goes Arthur Weston."

II

AND, if I did not want to be pursued like da Ricci, I wanted even less to be exploited like Sir James Harborough.

I had not seen him since the disastrous party at Medmenham three years earlier, when at one blow I smashed his designs on Anita and Doris's designs on him; and the years between seemed to have been years of social stagnation. He had abandoned politics for shipping amalgamations; and, resting on his baronetcy, he seemed scornfully content to keep open house for people whose names looked imposing in next day's papers. Meeting him on the morrow of some ball in 1914, I nodded and was passing on, when he stopped me to say:

"I didn't see you at my show last night."

When I told him that I had not been invited, he apologized and laid the blame at his secretary's door.

"Come and take pot-luck now," he suggested;

and, as it was a Sunday evening and I had nothing to do, I accepted from curiosity.

"I was sorry to read about your dad," he observed belatedly. "I saw something of him 'way back, long before he was the man he became. Or me, either, for that matter."

And then I divined the reason for my invitation! Under cover of a dispassionate comparison of the English and American laws of succession, Harborough tried for an hour to find out the exact size of my father's estate. The very rich and the very tall share a common childish jealousy of any one richer or taller than themselves.

"Are you going to settle down on this side?," he asked. "You'll find 'em a rum lot. They think they're using me," he cackled, as the second bottle of champagne loosened his tongue, "but I ask you: if I scramble a handful of sovereigns and all the lords and ladies go down on their knees to pick 'em up . . ."

The red whiskers wagged knowingly.

"I should have thought it would pall on you rather soon," I suggested.

"It amuses me," he answered truculently. "Don't you go away thinking I don't know the sort of things they say behind my back. You say 'em yourself, I make no doubt; you're college-bred." He threw me a suspicious glance from behind his big spectacles, then sniffed and drew his hand slowly back over his shining scalp. "But you're an American as well. People here think that, when a family's out-at-elbows, all it has to

do is to send out and bring back the best heiress in the market; *you* know that, if a girl's rich enough, she can buy an English lord as well as any other little trifle. Our American peeresses! Lady Chatfield's grandfather was a forty-niner!"

Harborough seemed to have drunk deep of disillusion since he and Jessie left Runcorn for a life of wider "scope", as he was always saying in those days; but, underlying his jests about peers who married into the "heiressage", I suspected that his own failure to marry into the peerage still rankled. Though Doris was our first link, he never mentioned her name; and it was only when he had dismissed the nobility in bulk that he brought himself to speak of the Ashdowns, enquiring whether I had seen them lately.

"Not for some time," I answered, wondering to what extent Anita was to him an impoverished earl's daughter, to what extent a lithe and fragrant girl whose commanding grey eyes and tossing auburn hair disturbed his rest.

"Pace too hot?," he enquired, sharpening the end of a match into a tooth-pick.

"I've been abroad," I said, "most of the time since we all met at your place."

The reference to Medmenham had the effect which I intended; and, while Harborough chewed his tooth-pick, I looked round his great dining-room and wondered how he would describe to himself the chapter in his life that opened when Doris had him invited to Ashby. By now Harborough must have been about fifty-seven; Jessie was

married to her obscure Irish peer; he had no other children and he seemed unlikely to marry again. His social technique, despite incurable uncouthness, had improved to the point at which he no longer seemed an interloper in his own costly house; and the efficiency which had devastated the impressionable Ashdowns, not excluding Anita, was no longer confined to his drying-cupboards and refrigerating-plant; but, as he talked of his sales and mergers, I wanted to cry out: "*Why this eternal getting and spending, this life, this house?*"

And what was I doing in it? Or in England? I was now thirty and the only son of a millionaire; a man in perfect health; with countless friends. Nevertheless I had no home, I could make no life for myself. With a stab of self-pity I realized that I was a failure, as completely and needlessly wasted as the shadowy figure of the girl who was squandering the spring-time of her life at Ashby.

"Some one told me that young Jew fellow da Ricci was, well, taking an interest . . .," mumbled Harborough.

I tried to remember what we had been discussing and realized uneasily that he was still worrying at the Ashdowns. For all I knew, he had invited me in the hope of getting news of Anita.

"That unfortunate fellow gets married off by the press at least three times a month," I said with a yawn that acted as an excuse for leaving.

That night for the first time I realized how vain had been my years of exile. I had accepted Anita's dismissal, as one accepts the fact of a locked door. I still sent her a telegram of good wishes on her birthday; but, as she would make no fight on my behalf, I pretended that I did not want her. Had I not asked myself, at the moment when our engagement was sanctioned, whether I really wished to marry a girl who attracted me chiefly by eluding me? Did I not admit, in my cooler moments, that nine-tenths of her power over me came from the fact that she was unattainable? I should be only honest with myself, though not too complimentary to Anita, if I admitted that, as like as not, had Ashdown allowed our engagement to be renewed, I should have lost interest in her. It was her will-o'-the-wisp quality that first drew me in pursuit of a girl whom I could hardly visualize and never describe; it was her habit of vanishing before I could be sure of her that kept me pursuing through so many years. Talk as I might of locked doors that I could not force, the mention of da Ricci's name lashed me to a paroxysm of jealousy; and I walked up Tottenham Court Road (Heaven knows how I got there on my way from Carlton House Terrace to Duke Street!) whispering, until the passers-by stared at my moving lips: "If I can't marry her, I'm damned if any one else does!" And in the morning I drove to the house which da Ricci had bought near Ken Wood and penetrated, through sand and lime, hollow hammering and the sour smell of mortar, to a gallery where

he was seated smoking on the naked end of a girder.

"So this is the new house?," I asked with a fatuity which set me blushing.

"Care to see it?," he asked with the impassivity that ultimately estranged him from all occidentals.

For an hour and a half he led me through room after room. I was given little opportunity of speaking, for da Ricci had a Jew's knowledge of the beautiful and a lover's tender pride in revealing it.

"It's the deuce of a big place for one man," I said, as he brought me down into the hall. "But I suppose you won't live here by yourself for long?"

"I never do anything for long."

"Of course, if you're going to marry and entertain a lot . . . ," I persisted.

"They're not bad rooms," said da Ricci modestly.

Though our exchange told me nothing, it unsettled me to the point of making me lie in wait for Doris and demand to know whether Nita was engaged or likely to be.

"I hope she'll marry *some* day," Doris answered. "Thanks to you, she's wasted all this time. . . . *You* wouldn't like to see her withering at Ashby, just because you can't marry her yourself?"

"I've yet to be convinced that I can't."

"But, Arthur . . ." She paused and looked at me in shocked surprise. "You're not still thinking

. . . It's absolutely out of the question. My dear, I see them every other day, I know what I'm talking about. Oh, I did hope you'd got over it by now! Listen to me, Arthur! If you really love Nita, think of your best, your only way of helping her. Isn't it by standing aside? . . ."

I must have made some gesture, for Doris stopped suddenly. One phrase had arrested my attention by its seeming incongruity; a man does not stand aside from a position which he is not occupying.

"If you did anything to unsettle her . . . ," Doris resumed. "But you couldn't be so diabolically selfish! Because you can't get her yourself . . . And you can't! I shall fight you tooth and nail over this," she warned me.

I stopped a passing taxi and drove to the City. Seymour Canford and I had not spoken together without an audience since my ejection from Ashby Hall; and I wondered whether his embarrassment equalled mine. There was a quaint survival of deference from the fag to the head of Arkwright's, swamped by a certain contempt for the degeneration which marriage may effect in a man; Seymour, the hero of my boyhood, was now so essentially the astute man of business, the smart man of fashion, the husband of his wife.

"I feel it's time we had a frank discussion," I said, as I sat down. I had not sent in my name; and only his fear of a scene before the clerks had enabled me to get inside his room. "For some years . . ."

"I'm afraid I can't go into this," Seymour interrupted, bending his head and stuffing a case with papers.

"You must. That line's all very well with your father; but you and I've been friends for a good many years, Seymour. I was engaged to your sister . . ."

"I can't go into this," he repeated. "My father and I . . ."

"Will you tell me what your father said?," I interrupted.

"I'll tell you one thing: we didn't want a scandal, or you'd have been thrashed out of this country."

Time had not taken the heat out of Seymour's fury; and I confess that I quailed, though I was ironically amused to realize that he could not know the offence for which he was so ready to horsewhip me.

"It didn't occur to you that there might be a mistake . . ."

"I'm not in the habit of doubting my father's word."

"But you wouldn't accept mine?"

"Not after *that!*"

"After *what?* Damn it, man, you're arguing in a circle!"

My tone held even less patience than my words; and in a moment Seymour's frail guard on his temper was broken. Leaving his chair, he came up to me, thrusting his face towards mine and standing with arms akimbo.

"Now, look here! I don't want any more of this," he said. "You nearly killed my father. You've done enough to ruin Nita's life, as it is. . . . I must go off to my next meeting. Good-bye."

I found myself standing by the table, a little out of breath, trembling and watching his broad, black-coated shoulders, as he strode down the passage. Returning home, I reckoned up my day's achievements: I had probably exasperated da Ricci with impertinent questions, and unquestionably wrung a declaration of open war from Doris and Seymour. I had also discovered that Anita was necessary to me as on the day when she promised to marry me.

III

When next I met Doris, our eyes were turned to another horizon. She was hurrying along Whitehall from Harborough's house, where they had been discussing emergency ways and means. An ultimatum had that day been sent to Germany; and Seymour Canford was applying for a commission.

"But has he had any training?," I asked.

"No, but Sir James thinks it will be a war of several months. How we're all going to live in the meantime . . ."

"Come to me," I said.

My proposal and Doris' way of thanking me for it illustrate better than anything else the change that overtook us in a single moment of a single day. The scene at Ashby Hall so many years

before was pushed into the background. Amnesty was the mood of the moment. And, when—as a matter of course—I accompanied Doris home, Seymour—as a matter of course—gripped my hand, eager to know whether America too would present an ultimatum.

"If I don't get knocked on the head first, we may meet out there," he laughed. "What fun if we did! I'm sorry there's been this difference between us, Arthur."

"So am I, Seymour," I answered. "If by any chance we *don't* meet again, I should like you to know that, whatever charge your father has brought against me, I'm innocent. Will you accept my word now?"

Seymour shuffled his feet; and I could see his cheeks growing pink.

"Don't let's discuss it," he suggested.

"I only ask you to admit your father may have been mistaken. If we were going into action at this moment, I'd say the same thing."

Seymour pondered and then held out his hand.

"I . . . I believe you," he stammered. "But it won't make any practical difference."

If I could convince Seymour, I did not despair of convincing his father; and a month later, when I had equipped an ambulance and learned to drive it, I called to bid him good-bye.

"I'm sure we're all very grateful to you and to your most liberal countrymen," Lord Ashdown answered with a lingering savour of amnesty still on his lips.

"It's all we're allowed to do, sir, at present," I answered. "Before I go, there's one thing I should like to say . . ."

I suppose my voice must have become more diffident, for I gave him an unintended opportunity of interruption.

"Arthur, I hope you're not going to . . ."

"I may not get the chance again," I interrupted in my turn. "I give you my solemn word . . ."

"You will do no good."

Amnesty died out of his voice and eyes. He was ordinarily a mild, gentle man, when his fierce pride and obstinacy were not involved; but I saw an expression of something like hatred freezing his features. I remembered my interview with Seymour in his office. Anita must have wrung their hearts.

"Lord Ashdown . . ."

"Good-bye, Arthur. I hope to see . . . I hope you'll come back safe and sound. Good-bye . . ."

So blessed and cheered, I left to play my non-combatant's part in a war from which I alone, of all the men whom Lord Ashdown had fathered and befriended, was to return safe and comparatively sound. Of the years that passed before our next meeting I shall have little to say. The peace of a tropical night is not stimulating to confused, old memories of a nightmare in which I worked and slept for months on end to the accompaniment of gun-fire, shivering in sodden clothes, unwashed

and unshaven, caked with mud, hungry, frightened and weary beyond expression. Am I not dreaming when I fancy that for nearly five years uncounted millions of men were directing their endurance and cunning to the task of killing and maiming one another and that it was my business in one tiny corner of the conflict to play a game of body-snatching with death? Naturally enough, before the war had run its course, most of my friends had paid the penalty of their youth in the epidemic madness of a world where old men decreed war and young men fought it; but must I confess that my values changed to a point at which I no longer asked whether a wounded man was by chance a friend but whether he was too grievously wounded to be worth saving and patching?

Now that it is all over, I can see that the war affected but little the main threads of my life, though the actors in my drama—becoming sensible of changed ideas—changed in their relations to one another. I have spoken of the amnesty that overtook our domestic feuds at the outbreak of war; and, before I have done, I shall have to speak of reconciliations that in the early days would have seemed incredible. There was no room for our old standards of intolerance and blindness when Lord Ashdown, say, was searching *The Times* daily for news of a son's death and when I came home on leave with a recollection of voices that had screamed to me in three languages, begging to be "finished off." What did it matter, in these days, if a woman had cheated at cards, if a man was wrongly

suspected, if two lovers were kept from meeting? What did anything matter but this ghastly war in which I could not even take a full part? It was in 1915 that I reported for duty with my ambulance; I drove it during the uneventful summer months which followed the battle of Neuve Chapelle; and then, after a succession of colds and chills, I retired to bed with rheumatic fever.

I had returned to England for Christmas leave, feeling very sorry for myself. I recollect sending the elderly stranger who was taking my servant's place in search of all the blankets and hot-water bags that he could get; and the next thing I knew was that Doris Canford was sitting by my bedside in cap and apron.

"I met your landlord in the street," she explained. "He remembered me from the days when I decorated your rooms for you."

"How long have I been here?," I asked.

"Oh, not long," she answered lightly.

At the time it seemed entirely natural that Doris should be nursing me; and now, when I assert that it was natural for my landlord to invoke her aid, for her to come and for me to accept her presence without question, I feel that our ready assumptions indicate the quality of our friendship better than a month of psychological probing and a year of prolix description. At bottom it was inevitable, unchanging, indestructible; and the hurts and disappointments we inflicted on each other strengthened our power of resistance. It occurs to me now, ten years later and for the first time, that I

never thanked Doris for coming; I know she did not want to be thanked.

"Have I been bad?," I asked.

"Yes, my dear, and you still are."

"How . . . ?," I began, meaning to ask how every one was; but my thoughts turned aside to speculate how Doris was allowed to be there.

I have not yet found the answer. If Lord Ashdown no longer thought me her actual or potential lover, there was no reason why I should be kept away from Anita; if he still distrusted me, I could not understand how he permitted Doris to come to my rooms unattended. Amnesty had its limits. Most probably, I think, he had succumbed to the mental confusion of those who are convinced against their will. One of the strangest imperfections of the human brain is its weakness in effacing an erroneous impression long held. If I learn that a man lives in Gray's Inn, I perhaps jump to the conclusion that he is a barrister; I tell my friends, whenever his name is mentioned, that he is a barrister, thereby fortifying my own belief. When I hear that he is a writer, I am convinced that he was a barrister first; and, though he may assure me that he never read a line of law, I am still disposed, when a legal point is being discussed, to reflect that here is a man who can help me, a man who lives in Gray's Inn, a barrister or at least a man who once read for the bar. The belief is held in good faith and in this instance it is harmless; I am only too well aware, however, that I have taken cordial dislikes to people on grounds as baseless,

detesting a man because I had heard that he was brutal to his wife and then, on learning that he had no wife, persisting that he was a brute generally. I make this confession with a feeling that other people's memories may be as prejudiced and inaccurate as my own. Lord Ashdown was not intentionally a cruel or an unjust man. I wish to defend him in the only way open to me, by explaining him.

When I was well enough to talk, I asked Doris for news; and she told me of change and upheaval on all sides. There were many marriages, more deaths, a general straitening and not a little stark ruin. The Ashdowns had closed their house in Leicestershire and were occupying a furnished flat in Ashley Gardens. Seymour had recently left Gallipoli for France; and Raymond was somewhere in the North Sea.

"And what about you?," I asked.

"I'm helping to run Harborough's hospital."

Amnesty, then, had spread to Carlton House Terrace.

"I was meaning about money. I suppose Seymour's various jobs have lapsed."

"Oh, every single one. I let our house in Hill Street to a rich old general; and we're existing on Harborough's charity. He said he'd make himself personally responsible for seeing that we didn't lose by Seymour's going."

"Well, if Harborough can't fight, he can afford to pay some one to do it for him. What about Ashdown?"

"I've never dared ask. I believe he approached Harborough about Ashby." . . .

"To sell it?"

Doris shrugged her shoulders:

"It's an ill war that blows no one any good! That man's *piling* up the millions! And he's quite certain of his peerage now; the Government daren't move a rowing boat from Broadstairs to Margate without asking his advice."

I remembered the night when Harborough asked me to take pot-luck at his house and girded, with tongue unloosened by a bottle and a half of champagne, at the "lords and ladies" among whom he scrambled his contemptuous handful of sovereigns. I was sorry to see the Ashdowns becoming dependent on him.

"And now, Doris," I said, "what about Anita?"

I had expected a frown; but her face surprisingly brightened.

"Oh, it went off all right."

"What did?"

"The operation," she answered. "Didn't I tell you? No, I remember thinking it would be better not to. . . . But it's sure to be in the papers. Appendicitis. She went sick at the hospital where she's been nursing in Boulogne."

"Is she out there now?" I asked.

"No. The moment we heard she was ill, Harborough went over and brought her back. I don't know what he didn't do in the way of ordering and hiring and bribing. I really believe he saved her life. . . . Now you've talked enough."

IV

I CANNOT say that the later stages of our conversation had composed me for sleep. With the intuition that is sometimes supposed to visit a man when he lies in plain view of death, I felt that I could see into Harborough's mind and follow each step in his new campaign. One is always tempted to generalize from one's own psychological anfractuosities; and I conceived that Harborough was acting not otherwise than I should have done in his place. He had laid Lord Ashdown and all his family under personal and financial obligation; he was socially ambitious; whether he cared for Anita or not, he had the self-made man's rankling hatred of being beaten and the successful man's obstinate patience in biding his time for revenge or triumph.

Well, I could lay no claim to unusual patience; by training I had learned to take a beating in good part and by temperament I was never tortured by lust for victory, but in other respects I differed little from Harborough when I found that something was essential to me. For seven years I had been obsessed by Anita's image. There were times when I wished her dead, in a mad hope that I should think of her no longer. And, if Harborough was equally obsessed, I cannot blame him for seizing a chance which I should have welcomed, however unchivalrously. Failing to win Anita in a straight fight, he was attacking her through her father. I could almost see him sitting by her bed and

conspicuously, pre-eminently saying nothing. He could afford to wait till Doris told her, as she had told me, that his timely car and purse had saved her life.

And I could do nothing. In April the United States came into the war; and Mr. Harper, learning that I was condemned to light duty for at least six months, cabled to know whether I would help him with a department which he was establishing in Washington. To a small extent in France, to a vague but greater extent in England I had picked up some strangely diversified knowledge of the British organization for war; and, on reporting for duty at the State Department, I was sent from committee to committee, with a store of inexpert advice which miraculously increased with every demand. Even at this distance of time I blush to think of the dogmatic opinions which I expressed on recruiting and transport, food-control and internment of aliens, the blockade and enemy propaganda, war-loans and the supply of munitions. To what extent any one was influenced by my counsel I hesitate to say; but, if I was ungrudging of advice, the mushroom departments that were now springing up in Washington shewed themselves insatiable in demanding it. And I had the cynic's consolation that others would have to reap where I had sown.

Not until the spring of 1918, when the last German offensive was being launched, did I hear anything of the world to which I had returned for the brief duration of my illness. I was leaving

one of my innumerable committees when Mr. Harper, whom I had not seen for some days, stopped me to say:

"Shocking about the Canford boys, isn't it?"

This—and what followed—constituted my earliest intimation that Seymour had been killed.

"I've heard nothing," I said, with that tightening of muscles round the heart that was by now so familiar a sensation.

The ambassador, as I must call him still, could add little to his bare statement of death. After surviving the whole Gallipoli expedition without a day's illness, Seymour had been picked off by a sharpshooter as he was reconnoitring by night. The Ashdowns had hardly received the news from the War Office, when the Admiralty took its turn and reported that Raymond, who had for six months been in charge of a destroyer, had struck a mine and been lost with his ship.

"It's well that Lady Canford consented to bear one son to carry on the family," the ambassador commented grimly.

"Have you had any news of her?," I asked.

Mr. Harper shook his head. I do not know whether there had ever been a personal difference, but his old attitude of disapproval was modified neither by time nor death.

"She'll marry again within a year," he predicted brutally. "Her first husband gave her position; the second will give her the means to keep it up."

I should have thought the ambassador unduly cynical, if his prophecy had not been so nearly

fulfilled. I sent a letter of sympathy to Lord Ashdown and another to Doris. The first replied with a dignity that moved me; the second effected a faultless literary composition. Doris used phrases of resignation and hope which I cannot in decency quote and which she ought not in decency to have used. Every pen-stroke, every sentiment was as correct as her own appearance at the memorial service, mournful, collected and hard as an indifferent photograph could make her. A second letter dutifully alluded once or twice to "my darling Seymour", but was chiefly a rhetorical speculation, presented under a dozen different guises, on the urgent problem how she was going to live and bring up her son.

"*Whatever sacrifices I have to make,*" she wrote, "*I'm going to keep* my son *from being robbed of his birthright . . .*"

In July I was pronounced fit to return to France. My first news of Doris came from Silverdale, whom I had not seen for half-a-dozen years and now met dining at my club on the night of my arrival in London. Despite the forgiveness which he habitually gave and took for all the sin wherewith the face of man is blackened, he was now as cynical as my ambassador had been.

"Lady Canford is bearing her loss with fortitude," he told me. "So are her friends, not excluding Sir James Harborough."

"She turned him down when she was nineteen," I said. "I don't know that he's grown more attractive in the interval."

" He's grown richer," replied Silverdale.

It was something, I felt, that Anita was no longer being hawked about as the " consideration " for any rich *parvenu* who might think of leasing Ashby Hall ; but I was uncertain whether I could hide my disapproval when Doris invited me to the Ashdowns' flat for tea. She begged me so eagerly, however, and attacked me so vehemently for risking another winter with the marks of rheumatic fever still on me that I had no opportunity of asking her about her own plans.

" I've promised to come home at the first hint of trouble," I assured her.

" Yes, but . . . accidents *will* happen. I've felt that ever since Seymour . . . One *does* expect a brigadier to be fairly safe." There was a long pause ; and I saw Doris changing to something that I had never been shewn before. Her patter and effusiveness, her brittle cynicism and bellicose worldliness left her ; she became uncertain of herself and ineffably tired. " I *do* wish you weren't going !," she cried. " *Must* you ? "

" I leave on Friday," I told her.

" I don't believe I shall ever see you again ! "

" What nonsense ! "

To my amazement, Doris suddenly began to cry. She collected herself to say :

" I *have* made a ghastly mess of things," and then began to cry again. " I wonder if you'll ever forgive me," she sobbed.

" Have I criticized you much ? "

" Ah, that's one of the conventions ! . . . Arthur,

you can't get out of people what's not in them. You've still to learn that, because you're an idealist. I *had* to go the way I've gone, because that's *me*. It's a rotten streak. But Seymour never found me out. And I've kept the family together. And my baby John still thinks I'm the most wonderful thing in the world. Anita . . . I can't make her out. She'd have killed me years ago, if she weren't a saint or a fool. And I can't make you out, because you still love me and I've behaved . . . well, it's no use talking about it. If I die before you, I give you leave to tell everybody everything. Let my baby down lightly, if you can . . ."

"You're suffering from nerves, Doris," I said.

"I feel I shall never see you again."

Ten days later she sent me a pencilled note to say that she was in bed with a cold. A week after that I read that she had died of septic pneumonia, following on influenza. I am not overmuch given to praying, but I prayed that night for the peace of Doris Canford's soul. Nothing that she could do would ever cure my love for her; and no one in the world could ever take her place. She—and not she alone—exclaimed at seasons of disillusion or bitterness that she was unworthy of any one's love, but I do not understand how a person who is able to win love and keep it can be unworthy of it.

V

In my second term of duty I found that the war was over before I had got into my stride; and, on

my return to London, one of the first men that I saw was Lord Ashdown. Pitiably aged, with blood-shot eyes and palsied hands, I hardly recognized him. His clothes were shabby; and, though nothing could destroy a little personal dignity which illuminated him in any garb or company, pride no longer tempted him to conceal that he was a broken and broken-hearted old man.

I met him walking down St. James' Street with Benjy Merton, whom nothing, I am convinced, could break. He, too, was aged; his brain was softer and more confused; in his garrulous conversation he repeated himself more than formerly; and his outworn geniality was indecently out of keeping with his black tie and mourning-band. I mumbled some expressions of sympathy; and Ashdown at once interrupted me to ask if I could spare time to come round to Ashley Gardens.

"Doris seems to have kept your letters ever since you were children," he announced.

I did not know what comment to make; and we walked for a quarter of a mile in silence, shedding Benjy at the Army and Navy Stores.

"She mentioned your name just at the end," Lord Ashdown continued. "She'd been delirious. . . . Something about a great failure. Then she said—I think her words actually were—'You can tell now, if you must'."

Again I made no comment, though Lord Ashdown was clearly expecting one. We skirted the Cathedral, plunged into a sombre hall and shut ourselves into the lift. Lady Ashdown, I was given to

understand, was not well enough to be in London; and, as Anita was looking after her in the country, the melancholy, ill-lighted flat was more than ordinarily desolate. The dining-room resembled a solicitor's office: table and chairs were covered with neat piles of papers, tied with white tape; there were despatch-cases and deed-boxes on the floor; and old newspapers, photographs and trinkets on the window-seat.

"Won't you take off your coat?," asked Lord Ashdown, but I would do nothing to lengthen my visit.

This last tidying-away of Doris Canford was almost insupportable. Her radiant vitality demanded of my imagination that she must go on when all else came to an end. All this belated orderliness would have revolted her disorderly spirit. Her warm heart would have rebelled against a business-like sorting of faded letters, once written in love and tenderness, into symmetrical piles with uniform blue-chalk dockets. "*Dietrich*" I read; and "*Harborough*"; and "*Weston*"; and "*John*": this last a young boy's errant pencillings, which started with brave printed capitals and ended quickly in pictures of motor-cars and big guns.

"These . . . are yours," said Ashdown.

I looked at the neat, substantial pile. Every letter was in order; and, as Doris had not arranged them, Ashdown must have done so after her death. He was unlikely to have looked only at the dates.

"She was very fond of you," he added. "I hardly realized."

"I hope, now that it's all over . . . ," I began.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I have no great reason to be satisfied with my handling of life. I need not remind you of the facts. Since reading certain of her papers . . ."

"I always loved Doris, sir," I said, "but I was never her lover."

In the long silence that followed, Lord Ashdown tried to assume his characteristic attitude when he wished to appear judicial: he leaned back with his elbows on the arms of his chair, but the poor old hands were so tremulous that they missed each other when he sought to press the tips of his fingers together. Nor was he better able to assume a judicial expression or tone.

"Appearances were against you," he mumbled; and his eyes fell. "It seems that I owe you an apology, such an apology . . . If *only*, when I gave you an opportunity of explaining . . ."

"I couldn't tell you the whole truth. I can't tell you now. But I can tell you this: I've been punished all these years for doing something which was intended to save you all—which *did* save you all—a great . . . well, let me call it 'unpleasantness'."

Lord Ashdown looked at me without understanding:

"I'm afraid I don't follow," he said.

"You wouldn't thank me, if I told you, though I could have explained it at the time. In fact, you'd never forgive me."

The old man looked at me with the same puzzled expression and then shrugged his shoulders.

" Well, Arthur, if I've done you an injustice . . . ," he began. " Wouldn't it be wiser, while we're on the subject, to tell me once and for all . . . ? "

" I ask you to take my word, sir, as I asked all those years ago."

Lord Ashdown fidgeted for a moment with his eye-glasses ; then, before I could say anything, he had taken out his watch and pulled himself stiffly to his feet with a muttered apology.

" I'm afraid I've kept you, sir," I said. " Before I say good-bye . . . I don't quite know what the phrase is, but . . . am I welcome here ? "

Lord Ashdown hesitated a moment too long to make any answer gracious :

" We are going abroad almost immediately. Sir James Harborough has kindly placed his villa at our disposal . . . "

There must have been a subtile hardening of tone or expression which I felt without defining. For all this new cordiality of manner, he was impenitent and, perhaps, unconvinced.

" But when you come back ?," I persisted.

" I feel it would be wiser for you to tell me everything that has to be told," he suggested, shutting the door which he had half opened and forgetting the time and his presumed appointment.

Looking round the sombre room, I saw again the neat piles of letters, the shabby trinket-boxes, all the poignant last sweeping-up of Doris Canford.

Something blinded my vision like a rush of blood to the head; and I resolved that I would rather die than tell her father-in-law that I had caught Doris cheating at cards.

"Haven't I said enough, sir?," I asked.

"It's as you think best," he answered.

I walked out of Ashley Gardens and into St. James' Park, trying to imagine what was passing in this stricken old man's brain. Hot and cold, black and white, guilty and not-guilty, yes and no . . .

Captured German guns were exposed as trophies throughout the length of the Mall; I leaned against one and tried to recover my temper. Once I turned back for a dozen paces to tell Lord Ashdown everything, but it was like mutilating the dead. Seymour was gone; Doris was at rest. If the worst came to the worst, I had only to wait for one man's death; and he was already old and broken. This was the utmost comfort that I could invent or discover when I sailed for New York in the first weeks of 1919.

My purpose in going I could define neither to myself nor to the dejected reporter who in default of bigger game pressed me for an interview. My work in the war, I told him, was done; my financial interests, too long neglected, were all in America; England, I added with deeper truth, was a country where there was really nothing to keep me. For his own purposes the reporter decided that my brief service with the Red Cross entitled me to be called a "millionaire-hero"; and my reference to

business inspired him to confuse the generations and to say that I was returning for good to take up the presidency of the Ribling Steel Corporation! For good? I had settled to nothing "for good" since I drove away from Ashby Hall in a dog-cart as crestfallen as its passenger.

It was at the end of March, when I was still in America, that I read in the London *Times* of the Lady Anita Canford's engagement to Sir James Harborough, Baronet.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Jesting of the Gods

" But you, had you chosen, had you stretched hand,
Had you seen good such a thing were done,
I too might have stood with the souls that stand
In the sun's sight, clothed with the light of the sun. . . ."
A. C. SWINBURNE: *The Triumph of Time.*

I

THE announcement was already ten days old. "*Forthcoming Marriages: Sir James Harborough, Bart., and Lady Anita Canford.*" They were to be married at once and "*very quietly*", owing to mourning in the bride's family.

The news reached me in the big smoking-room of the Atlantis Club; and for many minutes I had to fight for breath. As the room grew gradually darker, the great bronze replica of the Parthenon frieze crept slowly down the walls; and I knew that, if I did not make an effort to move, I should faint. Leaning to a bell, I rang for cable-forms. This, I told myself, must be stopped. Then, without waiting for the bell to be answered, I hurried into the hall. We were three thousand miles apart and I did not know Anita's address. Returning sanity warned me that, in any event, I could not telegraph:

" Implore you to wait till we have had an opportunity of discussing things."

The club was unbearable; and I was starting for Central Park in the hope of walking my fever down when I met Humfrey Barlow in the hall, opening his mail and blaspheming softly to himself.

" I didn't know you were in America," I said.

" I've been bottle-washing at our embassy ever since they invalided me out," he answered. " Two years. And now, with all apologies to your delightful country, I'm stuck here indefinitely. Trust the Government to wait till I've booked my passage . . ."

" When were you starting? "

" To-morrow."

" I'll take your cabin off your hands, if that's any comfort," I said.

A passage to Europe in the early weeks of the armistice was not to be obtained by ordinary patience nor even by extraordinary corruption ; and, when one fell unsought into my hands, I felt that destiny was recalling me to England. What to do when I arrived, I had no idea ; but my packing was finished before dinner and I left next day, with a letter from Anita which I dared not open for fear it might drown the call of destiny. Sandy Hook was out of sight before I went to my cabin ; and, if Anita was telling me that she was already married, I could not go back.

" I am sending this to your London chambers," she began, *" as the papers say you have gone back to America for good and I do not know your address*

in New York. It is to tell you that Sir James Harborough and I are engaged to be married. He is, as you know, a very old friend of the family; and there is literally no limit to the kindness which we have all received from him. Indeed, but for his care and attention, when I was ill, I should probably not be alive now.

"We are being married as soon as he can find out how long the government wants to make use of his services. And, as soon as he can retire from business, he means to settle down at Ashby. He always hankered after the place; and it will be a great relief to us all if we can go on living there. Father and mother could not bear to move anywhere else; and Mr. Merton is getting old and has always had some one to look after him, so it wouldn't do to turn him adrift. And then there's my nephew. It is a wonderful comfort to mother and father to have him; he is the great interest in their lives since Seymour and Raymond were killed; and father is very happy to be able to bring him up in the house that will one day be his.

"Our paths have lain apart for some years, but I am still and shall always be one of your devoted well-wishers. I hope you yourself will marry and have a very happy life."

When I had read the letter, I went for a walk on deck and tried to imagine why Anita had written it and what impression she intended to leave on my mind. It would have been better not to write at all, but I suppose she felt that would have been even more heartless than this arid string of stilted phrase which covered three pages and contained

no hint of affection or regret. I believe I should have been less hurt if she had written with blatant ecstasy; I should have felt—in time—that she was throwing me over for a man whom she loved more.

There was no tenderness nor passion, however, in her attitude to Harborough. She was grateful for past kindnesses and for his acquiescence in a convenient family arrangement, of which she was the price. I could fancy her writing, as a man talks against time in Parliament, to stifle discussion. And at the end, when she could put it off no longer, all that she found to say of all the years that had passed since we were first engaged was that our paths of late had lain apart. . . .

"What good I've done by leaving New York . . . ," I raged inconsequently. "It's one thing to write and quite another to look me in the eyes . . . But I don't know whether she's come back from the Riviera yet. If she's capable of selling herself in cold blood to a man like Harborough . . . And I can't reach her!"

An address at least was supplied to me when I met Benjy Merton at my club, two days after my arrival in England. Until the wedding, Anita would stay in her parents' flat, but he could not say whether she had yet come back from Cannes.

"I suppose you've, er, *heard*?," he enquired in some embarrassment.

"I saw it in *The Times*," I answered. "No particulars, of course."

At another time I should have recollected a

pressing engagement, but it occurred to me that Benjy, who had taken the place of the old half-blind retriever that ambled at Lord Ashdown's heels, might at least tell me how the sale of Lady Anita Canford to Sir James Harborough had been arranged.

"I was sorry for you," he wheezed, holding his cigar-case towards me. I shook my head and wondered, as I did so, whether I was already being offered a Harborough cigar. "I said to myself, 'He's had time to get over it, of course,' I said, 'but *still* . . .'"

I remembered the day in New York when the news reached me. Benjy's sympathy was well-meant but inadequate.

"No good going into that," I said.

"I was sorry, though," Benjy repeated, not to be done out of his maudlin emotion. "'The boy's fond of Anita,' I said . . ."

His conversation was insipid enough when it was served fresh; in the form of scraps, warmed up by himself, I could not swallow it.

"How long has this Harborough business been going on?," I interrupted again.

Benjy screwed up his eyes and squinted reflectively over the end of his cigar at the ceiling:

"He was very useful in the war. When poor old Seymour joined up, Harborough made it possible for Doris to live. I don't ask questions, but I fancy he gave some pretty substantial help to Ashdown; and, when the war came to an end, Ashdown, like every one else, began to take stock.

Both boys dead, says he; daughter-in-law dead, says he; self and wife not so young as we once were, says he; a grandson to look after, nothing to come from the other grandfather, says he; and just this one daughter to shoulder everything." Benjy paused to wink slowly. "It's a good rule, if you're living in another man's house, only to see with one eye and hear with one ear, but I fancy Ashdown must have done a little punting, not always too successfully. After that, it's not difficult to see what followed. Anita was the only person who could save the family fortunes. He's rich enough not to get in the way," he concluded in a tone that reminded me of Doris. "There's nothing so deadly as a small house and small means when a man and woman don't hit it off." . . .

He flung himself back into his chair and breathed heavily at the recollection of his own married life.

"Then you think Anita and he *won't* hit it off?" I said.

"What single thing have they in common?," Benjy demanded.

I had learned all that he had to tell me; and, at the risk of being rebuffed, I wrote to Anita at her father's flat, telling her that I had recently crossed from America and wished to see her for a moment, even if it was for the last time. I had thought of going unannounced to Ashley Gardens; but, if her parents were there, I should be throwing away my one chance.

As I walked home across the Park, da Ricci hailed me with an invitation to his box at Covent

Garden. I thanked him, without committing myself, and returned home to a dinner which I abandoned after the first course. Such blind misery and restlessness as I had not felt since I burst from the smoking-room of the Atlantis Club drove me into the streets and, meeting a line of cars in Long Acre, I remembered da Ricci's invitation and plunged into Covent Garden, as twelve days earlier, I had plunged into Barlow's cabin. By now da Ricci had probably given the box away to some one else, but I did not care. There was no need to imagine a call of destiny when I was only running away from myself. Covent Garden! A distraction for eyes and ears! Friends to greet, gossip to exchange between the acts! A three hours' narcotic! I would go to Covent Garden. No power on earth should stop me.

The lights were lowered and the opera had begun when I arrived; and I was hanging up my hat when I detected something familiar in the poise and modelling of a girl sitting by herself at the front of the box. As my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, I saw low-clustering curls that I knew; when she leaned forward, I divined—before I caught sight of it—the dimple at the back of her neck. I was unheard, unseen. Anita looked up right and left to the boxes in the Grand Tier, idly fingering a big orange fan which I judged to be a present from Harborough. Under her gloves she was presumably wearing his engagement-ring. . . .

I had no time for resentment. Anita's breathing had suddenly quickened until her shoulders trembled.

She fanned herself rapidly ; and the fan slipped from her fingers, balanced for a moment on the ledge of the box and dived into the stalls. A man's arm and the top of a man's head were visible for an instant, as the fan was returned to her. She bowed, whispering her thanks ; and, as her head moved, I marked in the refracted glow of the foot-lights that her cheeks were flaming. Still she did not turn, still I made no sound. . . .

And then, as though yielding to the urgency of a rack, her head drooped and swung half round until she was looking at me out of the corner of one eye.

"You !," she whispered ; and then, inconsequently, "I knew it was you."

"Anita," I said.

It was the first time we had spoken together since I entreated her to hear me on that far-off morning in Lord Ashdown's library. The radiant girl of those days had become a haunted woman of thirty, who sat with bent head, locking and unlocking her fingers.

"*Why* did you come ?," she moaned.

"I couldn't know you were going to be here."

It was true, I suppose, even when I was whispering between my teeth that no power on earth should keep me from Covent Garden that night, even when I saw the finger of destiny guiding me to Humfrey Barlow's side in the hall of the Atlantis.

She rose, swaying until she had to support herself against the side of the box. Outside in the passage

I heard the cheerful, inconsiderate voices of late-comers; and Silverdale's falsetto sent a shiver through me as I heard him pause to say, "I wonder if da Ricci's here to-night."

"Mr. da Ricci said I should be quite alone," Anita panted. "Otherwise . . . Please go, Arthur! Or, if you like, I will. . . . Why did you come back?"

"To stop this!," I answered.

"The marriage? You can't!"

"You're not in love with Harborough. You're marrying to pay a debt . . ."

We were still speaking only in whispers, but she put out her hand and covered my mouth:

"For God's sake, don't talk like that! . . . Oh, Arthur, please go away! You frighten me!"

Once—and, I fancy, once only—comes to a man the heady sense of power when he is master of the woman he desires to make his own.

"Was it fear that made you tremble just now?," I whispered. "When you felt I'd come back, before ever you saw me?"

"What does it matter? It's too late . . ."

"I'm not going to let you marry Harborough!"

Anita swayed once more; and her hand shot out and groped for the wall.

"Married . . . three weeks!," she gasped.

Harborough, then, must be returning at once. If I was not mistaken, a man had to be domiciled for three weeks in the parish where he was going to be married, unless he obtained a special licence.

"A lot can be done in three weeks," I said. "Anita . . ."

"But we were married three weeks *ago*! He had to leave suddenly . . . The relief-ships for Germany . . . He wanted . . . In case anything happened . . . So that I should inherit. . . . It hasn't been announced yet. We were all scattered. The public wedding . . . Oh, why won't you go?"

II

IT is unbelievably hard for a man, writing of himself, to describe his antagonism and affections without trying unconsciously to bias the reader in his favour. I have sought strenuously to exclude everything that does not bear directly and inevitably on the gradual interlacing of certain lives and destinies until a degree of complexity was reached when the sword had to be employed. It is, in the words of Humfrey Barlow, as "a problem, a challenge, a test-case" that I have tried to present myself. Society has ejected me; and to discover whether the fault lies with me or with society I have done all that I humanly could to abstain from marginal comments and moral judgements.

If I now break my rule for a moment, I only wish it to be realized that, in practising impartiality, I have not lost sight of ethical standards. I feel—and any who reads this will, I hope, feel with me—that, until my meeting with Anita in young da Ricci's box at Covent Garden, I had behaved weakly, perhaps, or romantically, or foolishly, not—

I submit—dishonourably. I feel—and here society has shewn itself in bitter accord with me—that, after this meeting, I behaved in a way which no man of honour would defend. I am not asking for mercy. It may be that the existing code is not elastic enough to suit exceptional cases, it may be that no human code of chivalry has been devised to embrace and justify my conduct.

I can fix no time for the beginning of my own mental change. The great emotional crisis is not uncommonly diversified with trivialities; and I recollect whispering to Anita that we must be quiet, because we were at Covent Garden (I do not yet know, I have never tried to discover, what opera was being played). I remember, during the stupor of the next half-hour, staring at a field of sleek scalps, intermittently illuminated by the glitter of diamonds. I can see again the bobbing head and waving arms of the conductor, dyed doubly black against the soft pink glow of the footlights.

Anita's eyes were such as I have seen in a man struck witless with shell-shock. It was the sight of them alone, I believe, that kept me from insane laughter.

"Sit down!," I whispered, "I'll get your cloak. As soon as you feel like moving . . ." Then I could be practical no longer. "Why . . . why did you do this?," I asked.

"I held out . . . I've forgotten how many years it is!," she answered stonily. "It . . . wasn't for my own sake."

"I was ready at any time. Why did you believe the lies they told?"

"I didn't! But I couldn't *not* believe father."

"He was wrong."

Anita's face had the stillness of death; her mind, it seemed, was not less calm than her face.

"Yes, I see that now. Perhaps just because it's too late." . . . Her voice and expression revealed no change. "And . . . when I see *everything* . . . I shall go mad . . . quite mad . . ." I looked away and then looked back. Her eyes were once more glazed with the dreadful, staring emptiness of shell-shock. I caught her by the waist; and, with a blink and a shiver, life and intelligence returned. She stroked my hand and tried to smile. "The papers said you'd gone for good."

"A liar in need of half-a-crown," I answered. "Shall we go?"

"Where?"

"Anywhere! The end of the world! To start our lives afresh," I whispered wildly. "In peace!"

She shook her head without resentment.

"That wouldn't be peace," she sighed. "It would break their hearts, . . . father's and mother's."

"So you prefer to break your own . . . and mine."

That far-away voice of mine, over which I had no more control than over the baritone thundering on the stage, could not decide whether to be petulant or pleading. I had forgotten that some time before

—hours, years, but certainly in that same opera-box—I had loomed above Anita, gigantically, dominantly as Colossus. . . .

"You must try to forgive me," she said wearily.

"But you don't expect to find peace this way."

The voice was growing argumentative and insistent.

"It's too late to change."

She lapsed into silence; and I tried to convince myself of this wall which had been erected between us by a few words hurriedly spoken as Sir James Harborough hastened in and out of a church on his way to America. The prevailing noise in the theatre changed; and I saw the flutter of applauding hands as a pair of red curtains tumbled into place. The lights went up; heads turned, men stretched themselves and went out to smoke. I wondered why Lady Anita Harborough and I sat on.

"Where is . . . *he*?," I asked, as we pushed our chairs back to be out of sight and to keep any one from entering the box.

"He'll be back any day now. I had a cable four days ago to say he'd started."

"Then you've still time."

I was still talking to myself, but something which I could almost see was forming inside my brain.

"What for?," she asked.

"To save your soul."

"You mustn't talk like that, Arthur," she sighed.

"Your father's contrived to spoil your life for ten years. Unless Harborough's a fool, he knows you don't love him . . ."

"I told him not to expect too much," Anita interrupted defensively.

Her voice quavered; and, as the lines of her personality became blurred, the sense of power was born in me anew.

"Anita, it will *kill* you to be Harborough's wife!," I whispered. "Kill your soul, your self-respect! You'd be lower than a woman of the gutter! Have they all hypnotized you? Don't you see that you're selling yourself?"

"*I* see it," she whispered, so low that I doubt if I was meant to hear. "I told father that I owed him so much. Mother hated the idea . . . But it's too late now."

"There's still time to save your soul," I told her again.

"But I'm married! It would be a sin . . . It's a sin even to talk like this!" As the stalls began to fill again, Anita rose to her feet with a stumble. "I don't think I can stand any more. It's so hot . . ."

She stumbled again; and I caught her in my arms. A violent shudder passed through her; and her eyes closed. Opening them, she pushed me aside as though my mere touch paralysed her resolution. I helped her into her cloak; and we walked without speaking down the stairs and into the hall. As we came into the street, she put her hand to her forehead, frowned and hurried

uncertainly to the left. It was only when we found ourselves in Covent Garden market that I asked where she was going.

"Home," she answered. "Carlton House Terrace. Oh! I had a car! I knew there was something I'd forgotten. . . . It doesn't matter."

I paused, but she hurried forward; and I followed her up Garrick Street, looking for a taxi. A light rain began to fall, as we entered Leicester Square, and I prevailed on her to wait in a doorway while I went in search of a cab.

"We're going in the wrong direction," I pointed out.

"I don't care . . . All right, I'll wait. Only don't be long."

As I stepped out of the doorway, a woman sidled up with a leer and a furtive whisper of endearment. I paused, because I did not care to leave Anita in such a neighbourhood and such company. The woman came nearer, breathing piteous fragments of desperation and suffering, and I gave her some money. A moment later a drunken soldier rolled across the pavement, bumped into her, linked arms boisterously and bore her off. I was setting out again in search of a cab, when Anita hurried after me.

"I'm afraid to be left alone," she said, clutching at my arm. "Arthur . . . That woman . . . Was that what you meant?"

I had spoken wildly and without well remembering what I had said, but a glance at Anita shewed me that she was fitting my shocking parallel to herself.

"My dear!"

"But you were right! I *am* selling myself . . . to the first man who'll take me. Was he drunk? That soldier, I mean? She looked quite young . . . young and pretty. What did she say to you?"

"She wanted me to give her some supper," I answered.

Anita stared in front of her, as the soldier rolled out of sight, leaning heavily on the girl's shoulder.

"Dear God!," she whispered.

III

We walked through Coventry Street and down the Haymarket.

I think the White Star office made me realize, more strongly than anything Anita had said, that England had finished with me. I could not live in London, if I were likely to meet her; and, though Harborough might talk of retiring to the country, he was too vain and too ambitious to buy a thoroughbred wife without wanting to make her shew off her paces. Within a year she would be entertaining for him; and in the house that he had bought he would exhibit the wife that he had bought, with his retinue of manservants and maidservants, his hired singers and dancers. I should not see it; but, if I lingered in London, somebody would tell me about it.

Harborough, I judged, would work her to the limit of her strength; I could not forget the self-protective sneer which he was wont to use in speaking of "these lords and ladies"; and he

must despise her for letting herself be sold. He would work her with little consideration, for the man had been a hard taskmaster all his life and Anita had kept him waiting until he had but few years to enjoy his new possession. If I could not prevent that, I could at least go away and avoid seeing it. And loyalty to her compact, pride in herself would make her pretend a gaiety and well-being that would be harder to see than honest misery; neither Harborough nor his wife could allow their parties to be spoiled by a frozen-hearted hostess. Anita would be gay, Anita would be vivacious, Anita would seem radiant. People would go to Carlton House Terrace, as they had gone to Hill Street and Pen Place, for a good time. . . .

Ere long I should hear that Harborough had achieved his oft-delayed peerage; there was substantial purpose in his ambition now. And Anita would have to present him with an heir. I did not want to read nor to think about that. The White Star, even in these crowded days, would give me a passage, if a passage were to be had. From New York I would go south, through the Canal to Peru and Chili, across the Andes on mule-back to Buenos Aires; for a year I could lose myself there, then move on whithersoever fancy led me.

"God!," I whispered. "You've *done* all this *before*, you fool!"

Though I hardly noticed it, we were walking more and more slowly; with every step that brought

us nearer to Carlton House Terrace, Anita was dragging more heavily on my arm. The rain had stopped; and taxis were reappearing. I signalled to one, but she countermanded it with the excitement of nervous passion.

"I'm not in such a hurry!," she cried with a jarring laugh.

"I was afraid you were tired."

"Only a little . . . frightened. He may arrive any minute now; and I'm not ready. I needn't go home yet, need I, Arthur? Can't we go for a little walk? What would happen, if just for to-night, I went to father's flat? He's at Ashby. No one would know I was . . . running away from it all."

"You have to meet . . . your husband . . . some time," I answered.

"But not to-night! It's meeting you! I'm frightened! If I went to Ashley Gardens and came back to-morrow, the next day . . . I could say I didn't like being alone in a big house."

She dragged yet more heavily on my arm, appealing for time and an excuse. I was too much exhausted to make another effort. There was an irony, a punishment for all my romantic vacillation, I told myself, in my having to lead her back to her husband. Already she was almost hysterical; and, if he chose this night for his return from America, he would spend the rest of his days with a mad wife or no wife at all.

"It is still not too late to save yourself," I pointed out.

"By coming with you? I want to, but it would kill father. I couldn't do that."

My exhaustion passed; and I gripped Anita by the shoulders till she winced with pain and fear.

"It soon *will* be too late," I cried. "Look here, I know what I'm doing; I'm asking you to commit a sin, to treat Harborough shamefully, to scandalize society, to break your parents' hearts, if you like. You'll be cold-shouldered and snubbed wherever you go; you'll pay the price of what you're doing, pay it over and over again, pay it in your heart's blood and never stop paying. It's not an *easy* thing I'm proposing. But, if you do it, you'll find your soul. All your life you've been tied to the dead, but we're not children any longer. Will you never be yourself, never have a life of your own? Come with me; and I will teach you what ecstasy is! They may try to cold-shoulder you, but you won't notice them. Haven't we deserved this, Anita? Haven't we waited long enough? You've never doubted my love; and you can't doubt your own now. I offer you all I have: my love for all my life! Come with me; and I *will* take you to the ends of the world and find you peace. We'll start our lives afresh; and you shall have love and tenderness and adoration. Will you come? You *shall* come!"

There was a strangled gasp; and in another moment she had collapsed in my arms. I looked round to see where we were. Waterloo Place. Men in uniform, men in evening clothes and opera hats, walking home from their clubs and staring

with well-bred curiosity. I carried Anita into the porch of the Athenæum and asked for water. As she recovered consciousness, she looked round once and closed her eyes.

"Where . . . ?," she began. "*I* remember . . ."

"Don't talk," I begged.

"I remember," she went on with a struggle. "I was going . . . Did I faint? . . . Arthur, I daren't! Take me home."

The passers-by were mercifully few, but they must have thought us drunk as we stumbled and staggered, clutching each other, into Carlton House Terrace. At the corner Anita checked and peered ahead at the dark face of Harborough's house. I felt a movement of her body, though I could not hear the sigh, when she saw that the windows were unlighted. We struggled forward again; and again she checked as a taxi passed us and drew up thirty yards ahead. I saw a man get out and pull after him a suit-case and kit-bag. He was tall, burly and whiskered. The light of the side-lamp glinted on his spectacles as he bent to count out his fare. At the same moment Anita dragged me round and buried her face on my coat.

"I can't, I daren't!," she sobbed. "Take me away! To-morrow . . . Next day . . . Not to-night!"

IV

As the door closed and the taxi came slowly towards us, I hailed it and told the driver to take us to Ashley Gardens.

At the time there was no leisure for reflection —and heaven knows there has never been cause for mirth—that the taxi which brought Sir James Harborough back to his deserted house took away, for next fare, Sir James Harborough's wife ! Clearly as though it had all happened last night, I remember wondering whether a servant or porter would be at hand to let us into the flat (even if Anita had a key, she was unlikely to be carrying it to the opera) ; I wondered whether she or her mother had left any clothes that she could wear that night or when she took her next step, whatever it might be and whatever excuse she might offer to her astonished husband, in the morning ; I wondered whether Lady Ashdown, too, was in the country, and whether she was well enough to take charge of Anita, whether I should take Anita to Ashby by the first train and hammer into her parents' heads that, unless they gave the girl time to recover, they would send her out of her mind. I remember wondering if I should tell the driver to wait. I remember deciding that, as soon as I had made Anita comfortable for the night, I must take a long walk to save my own brain.

After this, my recollection becomes less clear. I believe Anita said good-bye to me in the taxi and that I told her I would wait till she was safely inside the flat. To my surprise she had a latch-key ; and I fancy she explained that, when the size and emptiness of Carlton House Terrace strained her endurance beyond bearing, she hurried away on the plea of wanting to arrange her dead brothers'

papers. Certainly the flat looked as if it were in full commission: the rooms were warm; and there were fresh flowers in all the vases.

"What are you going to do now?," I asked, as Anita turned on the lights and sank listlessly on to a sofa.

She pressed her hands to her eyes:

"I don't know! I suppose I can say I came here to get something . . . Not knowing, of course, that he'd be coming back to-night. Then, I can say, I didn't feel very well . . . *That's* true enough. The car! I suppose that's still waiting for me!"

"If you'll tell me the number, I'll make up an excuse and send it home."

"Will you? Arthur, before you go, there's just one thing. You've been very faithful to me all these years, but I've been as faithful to you . . . till now. Again and again when they tried to marry me off. . . . Even though I knew I should never be allowed to marry you . . . Darling, I must seem very mean-spirited, but father had had one stroke and another might have killed him. I suppose I'm a coward. I suppose I've behaved abominably to you, but I haven't spared myself. You're the only man I've loved, the only man I've wanted to marry. You still are. You always will be. . . . I'm afraid it doesn't do any good to say this, but I wanted you to know. . . . Now I must say good-bye. Before you go, kiss me and say you'll try to forgive me. Kiss me good-bye. Kiss me, kiss me, kiss me! Let me feel for a

moment that you've belonged to me! Kiss me! Kiss me!"

As I caught her in my arms, her voice faltered and died. Only the fierce beating of her heart shewed me that she herself had not fainted again or dropped dead. For the first time since I had been turned away from Ashby, our lips met, our pulses throbbed in unison, we clung to each other as though we were never to part again. At intervals the rumble of traffic from Victoria Street was borne through the open windows; I heard Big Ben chiming the quarters. And once, for a moment, I wondered what Sir James Harborough was thinking in the deserted house a mile from the silent room where his wife lay half-asleep in my arms.

Not then, not for many weeks or even months did I ask myself what had brought us there. Step by step, our course seemed inevitable; and I should no more think of blaming myself than of blaming Anita. Later, when cool-blooded judges tried to make the one or the other responsible, she and I could only smile; when they talked of her upbringing or of mine, of her cloistered life and the hold which her religion should have had, of my supposed American chivalry and the code I was presumed to have acquired, in the last resort of our "traditions" and obligations, of discipline and self-control, I could only feel that they might as profitably rebuke a supposedly torpid river for bursting its banks. That night we knew only that we had met at last and belonged to each other, that misunderstanding and malevolence, quixotism

and stupidity, distance and time itself were powerless to keep us apart.

Outside, the rumble of traffic sounded at longer intervals. The clocks, when I heard them, were now striking the smaller hours. A silence heretofore broken only by whispers deepened to peace that we could feel creeping into our very souls.

With her white arms still clasped about me and her cheek against mine, Anita fell asleep.

Had I wished, I could not have slept that night. When day dawned, bringing with it a chill that made Anita shiver, I wrapped her cloak round her and sat where I could watch her smiling in her sleep. Much had to be decided, much arranged; and I did not know where to begin. To say that we must turn our backs for ever on England and America was easier than to say where we should make our home; and, even when I could think of places where the world would leave us more or less in peace, I realized that time was needed before we could escape. The way of the wrong-doer, if we consented to call ourselves wrong-doers, seemed difficult enough to be considered almost deterrent. Before we could leave England, we must obtain passports; until we obtained passports, we must live apart or under assumed names. We must travel by different boats. And, before we thought of running from the world, we must decide how the world was to be told of our flight. For half-a-dozen hours Sir James Harborough had been mildly wondering, uneasily spinning theories, lashing himself with indignation and fear, becoming

active. I tried to put myself in his place; should I have roused the police? Should I hurry to Ashley Gardens in search of news?

V

I WAS making sure that the front-door was secured, when the telephone-bell rang in the hall.

Anita moved in her sleep, then opened her eyes and looked about her with a frown of perplexity. She saw me; and for a moment her eyes became fixed on mine, looking through me and demanding of us both what we had done. Then she held out her arms to me and clung for protection. So a woman might look after committing murder for a man she loved, asking herself—when it was too late—whether he was worth it.

"Thank God!," I found myself sobbing.

Anita threw her arms round my neck and pressed against me like a frightened child.

"Why do you say that?," she whispered.

"Thank God you don't regret it!"

"Do you?"

"Sweetheart, you know I don't, but I was frightened. While you were sleeping . . ."

"Didn't you sleep too?"

"I couldn't . . ."

The bell of the telephone rang again; and from force of habit I crossed to the instrument. At that moment a clock struck six; and I looked at Anita.

"You'd better . . . ," she began. "Six o'clock! Are you going to say I'm here?"

She too, then, had no doubt who was at the other end of the line.

"We'll see." . . . I unhooked the receiver and tried to disguise my voice: "Hullo?"

Sir James Harborough, unexpectedly calm, verified the number and asked if I could give him any news of Lord Ashdown.

"He's in the country," I answered in surprise. "Do you want his address, sir?"

"Oh, I know it, thanks," replied Harborough. "Er, it's Sir James Harborough speaking. I'm sorry to knock you up so early, but I only got back from America last night and everything is in such a muddle that I can't get a clear account from anybody. The family is at Ashby, you say?"

"I believe so, Sir James."

"You know that his lordship has been taken ill? Yes. Very suddenly. A telegram arrived here last night before I got in. Lady Anita had gone to the opera; and I can only presume that she had the news there. She seems to have gone to him at once. At least, the telegram . . . I was wondering . . ."

The voice became hesitant.

"Is there anything you wish me to do, Sir James?," I asked.

"Well, I really don't think there is. I telephoned on the chance that you might have some later news. I'm afraid things are very serious. It's another stroke; and at his lordship's age . . . I No, I don't think there's anything we can do. shall stay here till I hear from Lady Anita. She'll

probably telegraph in the course of the day. . . . Thank you. Good-bye."

I hung up the receiver and tried to collect myself in the moment before Anita began to question me. So Lord Ashdown was dying. The blow might have fallen at any time in the last half-a-dozen years; and, though she would be bowed by the loss, Anita would not be taken by surprise. With me, she would probably feel that he had earned, more fully than most, release from the rack of this tough world where he had been so long stretched. If he might die in peace, she would ask no more. Later, we should have to consider her mother; and, for the first time in all the years that I had known the family, I was struck by the strange, almost pathetic unimportance of Lady Ashdown. The uncomplaining drudge of a tottering house, the unassertive plaything of fate, she had borne children and brought them up, she had ordered meals and engaged servants and contrived economies, all with such suppression of herself that I could not credit her with a single enthusiasm or even a single taste. Submission seemed the key-word of her life. She submitted to Doris and allowed herself to be packed up and dumped down in Hill Street or Pen Place; she submitted to the war and accepted the death of Seymour and Raymond. She was submitting now to the slow passing of Ashdown. Would she submit to Anita and me?

This was a question which I had not found time to ask myself before; nor had I thought what would happen to Ashby and to the boy whom

Doris had left. We must decide that very soon, but for the moment I could only clutch at the respite which Harborough had granted us. So far he suspected nothing. He would suspect nothing so long as I kept Anita at Ashby. And I intended that she should remain at Ashby until I had determined on our sanctuary and arranged our escape.

"Why was he telephoning here?," she asked.

"Some bad news, I'm afraid," I answered. "Your father's ill again. They telegraphed for you yesterday evening, just after you'd gone out. I think you should go down to Ashby as soon as you can. When you get there, you must tell Harborough where you are . . ."

Anita pulled her cloak round her and sprang up.

"Father . . . ?," she repeated.

"I don't know what was in the telegram, but I should think things are very serious. Harborough is staying in London till you send for him. And I . . ."

"You?"

"I'll come with you, if you like, but I think you'd better go alone. When you're ready for me . . . My darling, we must decide what we're going to do. We can't stay in England . . ."

"You think father's dying?," she interrupted, as though she had not heard me.

"I'm afraid so."

"Will you see about trains?"

While I hunted through Bradshaw, she began to dress, silently and with feverish haste. By the

time I had telephoned for a taxi, she was ready to start.

"I'll take you to Marylebone," I said.

"Mother's all alone," said Anita. "Isn't it awful for her?"

"You'll be there very soon now. And you'll let me know?"

"What do you want me to tell you?"

"When I can see you. And where. We have a lot to arrange, sweetheart. If possible, I don't want you even to see Harborough again. I want to take you away, but we must decide where we mean to live. We can't discuss that now . . ."

"No! We must see first if mother wants me . . ."

I helped her into the taxi without trusting myself to answer. For one night we had belonged to each other; and I was in danger of forgetting that a living form or a shadow of the dead could come between us. I had almost forgotten that Anita had sacrificed the spring-time of her life to one parent and was capable of sacrificing her summer to the other.

"Mother has become so old the last few years," she explained.

In one sense, I felt, her mother had always been old. She belonged to another generation, almost to another century. She was of the unburied dead.

We drove without speaking. If Lord Ashdown recovered, I wondered how soon Anita would be ready to leave him; if he died, I was compelled

to wonder if she would ever be ready to leave her mother. Looking up suddenly, I found Anita watching me with the terror-stricken expression which I had seen in her eyes when she awoke that morning. As though she had put her doubts into words, she was asking herself again if this brief hour of love was worth while. My heart seemed to sink and grow cold within me.

"My darling, *whatever* happens . . ." I whispered in agony.

"I'm dazed!," Anita sighed.

I put her into the train and kissed her good-bye. When I returned to my rooms and waited for my bath to be prepared, my attention was caught by a headline which announced

DEATH OF A VETERAN PEER.

CHAPTER NINE

When the Bough Breaks

"The pound of flesh which I demand of him
Is dearly bought, 'tis mine, and I will have it."
SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice.*

I

BY the train following Anita's I despatched a special messenger with a letter of sympathy to Lady Ashdown and an offer of general assistance. I should have done no less at any time, but I remember feeling that the last twelve hours had made me, in a quaint, illicit manner, responsible for the family and proportionately jealous of an outsider's interference. Sir James Harborough, the husband of Anita and the son-in-law of Lady Ashdown, I could not regard otherwise than as an outsider. If they had room for me, I said, I should like to stay at Ashby and to take charge of the funeral arrangements. By now, though estrangements had parted us at times, I was one of their oldest friends; and I claimed the right to undertake duties that would have fallen to Seymour or Raymond if they had lived.

While I waited for the answer, I pondered the change that had come over my life since Anita told

me to kiss her good-bye and we stood, locked in each other's arms, heedless of the future and oblivious of the past, realizing with an annihilating conviction which our blurred and strangled words could never express, that, if the world came to an end in an hour's time, we must for one moment between eternities belong to one another. It was that reference to Seymour and Raymond that set me musing. Had they been alive, had I found time and detachment to think, I supposed I should have turned over in advance the hard names which they would be justified in applying to the man who stole their sister from her husband. Their death, I might have felt, only increased my obligation to protect Anita. If, as in fact had happened, neither of us was able or willing to stand up against the pent wave of passion that swept us into each other's arms, I should have imagined that some overmastering sense of guilt and treachery would have sent me slinking from their path; as they were dead, I should have been ashamed to think of them.

In fact, as I mused and waited, I could only think of Anita and myself as people setting out on a journey and intercepted at the last moment by troublesome strangers of whom we had to get rid without undue discourtesy. I remember realizing without the faintest embarrassment that I should be meeting Harborough at the funeral, that I should be shaking him by the hand, that we—the men of the party—should be putting our heads together and deciding what was best for the women. While he carried out his hundredth survey of the house,

I should be perfecting my own plans for snatching Anita away before he could sign the lease of Ashby; and, thinking of this vast, dilapidated old house, I fell to thinking of the queer part that it had played in all our lives. Once and once again and once a third time Sir James Harborough had dipped his pen in the ink; and always I, who had no interest in the house or its fate, had interrupted the negotiations.

Of late years Harborough had perhaps fallen out of love with his dream of lording it over Ashby, if Ashby was to find accommodation for the Ashdowns and Benjy Merton and the little Canford boy; but I would have staked my life that, when he too read of the "veteran peer's" death, he was asking himself why he should not step into the dead man's shoes. For all I knew, the train that bore my special messenger to Market Ashby was also bearing Harborough; and Harborough was perhaps now assuring Lady Ashdown that her husband's death would make no difference to her place and manner of living. Maybe, remembering Medmenham, he would drop me a hint that my future invitations to Ashby would depend on his favour. And I should make a courteous answer of some kind while my brain busied itself with the names of safe, remote islands where Anita and I could find the peace that had so long eluded us. San Agostino; a week from New York and a fortnight from England; five miles by three; surf and palm-trees . . .

I cannot say too strongly nor too often that in

these present pages I am trying to describe a frame of mind and am leaving my defence to take care of itself. Before I left England for the last time I had heard all the strictures that could be applied to my conduct and all the names that could be hurled at myself. Though more than two and a half centuries had passed since the Puritans elevated the common life and enriched the common language of England, the authentic flavour of Deuteronomy and Leviticus clung to the lips of my judges; if I make but sparing use of such words as "adultery" and "seduction", this is not because I was not made familiar with them nor because I wish to veil my offence under a milder synonym. It is that words, which should be capable of expressing the most subtile shades of thought, fail—in my inexpert hands—to explain that, though Anita and I had taken the most important step of our lives, established the closest intimacy and, according to our judges, committed the greatest sin, neither of us could feel more profoundly moved than if we had cut our partners at a dance by gossiping too long over our supper. We were lovers in spirit before we became lovers in name and in fact. Were we still so much intoxicated by passion that we had forgotten our old values?

Or did we lull ourselves with a whisper of "inevitability", reducing our wills to chemical elements that "inevitably" exploded in a given atmospheric condition such as fate and Sir James Harborough supplied on the night of his return from America? I have been asked how I had the heart or the

heartlessness to invade, the day after Anita and I became lovers, the shrouded privacy of Ashby, lowering my voice when I talked to Lady Ashdown and taking leave of the waxen old body whose spirit, I was told, might at that moment have been looking down on me with the eyes of omniscience. I can only say that it seemed the most natural thing in the world. Heartless I should only have felt if I had stayed away or omitted to say farewell to the kindly, obdurate and misguided old man who had done more than any one else to teach me such a word as inevitability. I have been asked how I could meet Harborough after robbing him of the wife from whom he had parted five minutes after their marriage; I can only answer that he mattered to me no more than a potentially tiresome fellow-guest who had to be kept out of mischief until we had turned our backs on him for ever.

This is how I felt. I am the last person to say that this is how I ought to have felt. " A tiresome fellow-guest " represents my image of Harborough when I received Lady Ashdown's telegram; but, though I was resigned to staying in the same house with him, it had not occurred to me that we should be fellow-travellers until he got into my compartment at Marylebone. I was reading the obituary notices and observing that, after the words " *by whom he had two sons* (*both killed in action*) *and a daughter* ", came a statement which I ascribed to the pen of Harborough himself. " *Though for family reasons the announcement has not been made public before, Lady Anita Canford was privately married to Sir*

James Harborough Bart. last month before the British vice-consul at Cannes." I followed up my greeting with phrases of congratulation and good wishes that to me at least did not seem more cynical than if I had felicitated Harborough on a dream which he had been describing.

" Did they send for you too ?," he asked in some surprise.

" I wrote to know if I could help," I answered ; and for the rest of the journey we sat without speaking, I wondering whether my voice would recall to him the voice which he had heard that morning.

Though I pretended to read, I knew that Harborough was watching me ; and once, when I dropped my paper, I surprised an expression that perplexed me until I recalled Du Maurier's picture of Svengali straining out of his box towards " the three musketeers of the brush ". Like Svengali, he seemed to be saying : " *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?* "

We were met at Market Ashby by a hired car and driven to a house that seemed to have borrowed a new repose from the worn-out figure who was resting upstairs before being carried his last stage. Lady Ashdown and Anita were calm and efficient. Though I had not been inside the house since my engagement was ended for me, a truce had been called even to the warring of bitter thoughts and silent recriminations. Until the funeral was over, we did not discuss what was to follow it ; and only the eyes of omniscience could have guessed

which of Anita's neighbours was her husband and which her lover.

" It's been like an anæsthetic," a voice murmured on the night after the funeral.

I too was feeling so deeply drugged that I needed time to realize that Anita was speaking and that we were waiting vaguely in the hall until the last of the cars had driven away.

" Is Harborough . . . ?," I began, then stopped because I did not know what I was trying to ask.

" He's changing. Arthur, he wanted me to go back to London with him. I said, of course, that I couldn't leave mother yet, but this is bringing things to a head. Meet me in the library as soon as he's gone; and please remember I haven't had time to think of anything since I came here."

II

It was almost six o'clock when Harborough drove away; and with short intervals, when Anita went to her mother's room, we sat talking till midnight.

" You sit there," she began, pointing to a sofa. " I'll sit here," she continued, pulling an arm-chair out from the wall. " We must be terribly cool and collected, Arthur. No scenes, no emotions, no reproaches . . ."

" Reproaches?," I echoed.

" I don't know what we shall have said by the time we've finished! I don't know how to begin! I don't know what I'm trying to say . . ."

" Then, sweetheart . . . ," I began.

"You mustn't talk like that!," she broke in sharply. "No endearments! I've put you on the other side of the room because I'm afraid to let you touch me, afraid to sit where I might try to make you touch me. Well, Arthur? Is it any easier for you to start?"

"I don't think it is. I was just picturing the last time we were here. You remember that morning?"

I broke off to look at Anita with a new and frightened interest. Since last we were together in that room, I had twice caught a glimpse of her in a London ball-room. Otherwise I had not even seen her until we met four nights ago. When we set ourselves to argue what our future should be, I realized for the first time that Anita's mind must inevitably have developed in the last ten years. What, I now wondered, were the books she had read, the friends who had influenced her? Apart from a strange, fanatical self-effacement and obedience, her character was unknown to me.

"I believe I've spent more of my life in this room than anywhere else," Anita murmured. "Here and in the chapel. I went there to pray that God would clear things up somehow. And I came here to argue things out with myself. It ought to have been so simple! I trusted you absolutely. And I trusted absolutely in father's judgement. There was some tiny misunderstanding . . . At the end I'd ceased to believe in God; and I've ceased to think that life can ever be simple. What are we going to do about it, Arthur?"

"There's only one thing we *can* do," I cried.

Anita put her finger to her lips and smiled wanly :

" My dear, if it were as simple as that ! Quite clearly I can't do right by you and mother and my husband. I've been wondering very humbly how I can do least harm, cause least pain. . . . Oh, thank God father was dead before this began ! "

With a sudden loss of control she buried her face in her hands. I sprang up, then sat down again.

" Do you regret it, Anita ?," I asked.

" How much easier it would be if I did ! My dear one, if I wasn't in love with you, I could go back to my husband ! I should always be in love with you, though, even if we weren't one flesh. But that doesn't give me the right to break mother's heart with a scandal. And there's no reason why my husband should pay for my mistakes."

" Was it a mistake that night . . . ? "

" No ! It was a mistake for me to marry him, to think I could do without you, to wait all those years. That night I wanted you, Arthur, as I've never wanted anything before. I wanted to be kissed by you, I wanted your arms round me, I wanted your voice, your brain mingling with mine. I wanted to have a child, *your* child. I don't go back on the one real thing that has ever come to me, but mother's over seventy, Arthur . . ."

" You're not suggesting . . . ? "

" That we should wait till she dies ? Dearest, I'm not suggesting anything ! I'm thinking of a little, fragile old woman whom I've just helped into bed : terribly tired, terribly bruised, but sustained by the marvellous patience which you

find in women of her age when they believe in God. Since Seymour and Raymond were killed, she seems to have concentrated on me; and there ought to be some peace for women of her age! I wonder how I should feel, as an old woman, if I'd gone through the pain of bearing children and the anxiety of watching over them and if they'd then died before me? It would seem so wrong! . . . As long as mother's alive . . ."

I sprang up in impatience which I could not control. Ten years before, in that same room, Anita had sacrificed me to one of her parents, now she was sacrificing me to the other.

"Is she more real than our love?," I demanded.

Anita winced and leaned to the bell.

"Let's have dinner in here," she proposed. "Arthur dear, that came very near to being a reproach. You must never say: 'Choose between her and me.' If I could make choices like that, I shouldn't have wasted so much of our lives. . . . And so far we've hardly mentioned my husband. I don't feel that being unfaithful to him gives me the right to ignore him. . . . I shan't dress. It's very late and I'm very hungry."

"I shall be glad of some dinner," I said. "It's the one thing that may keep you from arguing our love out of existence."

Anita sighed and walked slowly to the door.

"That sounded bitter; and bitterness is death to love. I've decided nothing, Arthur; at present I can only see that somebody will have to be sacrificed. If I could cut myself in three equal parts . . ."

As she hesitated by the door, I took her hand.

"I want you and I can't share you," I whispered. "I want *you*, your companionship, your eyes and hair, your voice and laugh, your thoughts and dreams. Anita, we can't go back . . ."

"No . . . But there must be no scandal."

"How can we avoid it?"

Anita turned away with a slight shrug.

"How do other people avoid it?"

"You mean you'll consent to live in Harborough's house?"

"But not as his wife. He promised that, if I would marry him, we might live in different parts of the house."

"Wouldn't you feel . . . dishonoured?," I asked.

Anita bowed her head and walked slowly upstairs.

"Some one has to be sacrificed," she answered.

As I came out of my room, five minutes later, she met me with a message that her mother wanted to say good-night. And the little old lady—tired, fragile and patient as Anita had described her—kissed me for, I think, the only time in my life and whispered that she could not let this day draw to a close without thanking me for all I had done. If Anita had contrived the meeting and inspired the speech, she could not have convinced me more simply that, whoever had to be sacrificed, it must not be Lady Ashdown.

And evidently it was not to be Harborough, for Anita asked me in words how long she could decently remain away from him. Instead of answering, I enquired in my turn how soon she could escape

again ; and my horror at seeing a romance degraded to an intrigue was swamped in greater horror because the intrigue had no end. Though I returned by a dozen paths to the same point, I could not make Anita see—or, if she saw, to admit, or, if she admitted it, to weaken on—the point that, while she scrupulously shielded her mother and respected at least the letter of her promise to be Harborough's wife for ceremonial purposes, she was driving us along a road where we should come first to despise and then to hate each other.

When midnight struck, we were still arguing inconclusively ; and at the same moment, in the same words and tone we said :

" Well, don't let's decide anything to-night."

The tone was pacific, almost congratulatory, as though we had skated over much thin ice and could plume ourselves on not having fallen in, even if we had not reached the edge of the lake. Next day I returned to London. There was nothing more for me to do ; and, if I had manufactured an excuse for staying, Anita would have demolished it.

" The sooner you get away, the better," she told me. " We'll meet in London . . ."

" When are you coming back ?," I interrupted.

" That's the trouble ! He—I suppose I ought to call him my husband—, he didn't like leaving me here yesterday ; and this morning I received a very stiff letter beginning '*My dear wife . . .*' I don't know whether he imagines I can ever be his wife . . ."

" But I thought he promised . . ."

"I don't attach great importance to what a man promises before he marries," Anita answered, "though perhaps I'm not the right person to say that. I shewed the letter to mother in the hope that she'd ask me not to leave her yet, but she said at once that it was my *duty* to go. I told her . . . I suppose I lost my nerve, but I told her I *couldn't* go back to him . . . *yet*. I wasn't in love with him, I never had been. I said I'd been in love once—with you—and that I was still in love. Poor little mother! She tried to explain away our love by saying that girls before they married often *fancied* . . . and so forth. I said there was so little fancy about it that I must stay here till I was in a better state to face the future. Then, mother said, the only thing was for you to go."

I bowed and rang the bell for the *A.B.C.*

"And you?," I asked.

"He's invited himself here for the week-end and he says he can take me back on Monday. I must see how I feel. If he means to keep his promise . . . If he doesn't, I shan't go! I shall tell him what I told mother. And she won't want me to! *She* must understand, even if *he* doesn't."

We parted without arranging to meet again, in such stupor that I never even asked her to write. For a day or two I waited for a letter; and for a day or two I felt hope slowly dying. I could not write myself; I could not think; and I had so little sense of time that I have forgotten how soon it was that I caught sight of Harborough in

St. James' Street and he crossed to the other side of the road.

"Now at least," I said to myself, "we know where we are: Anita has told him that she can't live with him as his wife because she's still in love with me."

I have forgotten, too, how soon it was after he had cut me that I heard a voice of authority saying to my servant:

"I want to see Mr. Weston. No, I won't give a name. I'll walk straight in."

I was dressing for dinner at the time; and I remember noting with satisfaction that I had a pair of Indian clubs within reach if my visitor's behaviour matched his tone. Harborough flung open my door without ceremony, slammed it in the face of my servant and advanced into the middle of the room, demanding that I should tell him where his wife was.

"I've not seen her or heard from her since I came back from Ashby," I said.

"That's a damned lie!," he shouted.

I walked to the door and was opening it when Harborough pushed his foot against it.

"Your time is too valuable," I said, "for you to waste it in talking, however agreeably, to people whose word you don't believe."

"You've been putting ideas into her head," he continued. "Setting her against me."

"It was unnecessary."

"Oh, you think you can be funny with me? I'll give you one minute to say where she is . . ."

"I've told you: I don't know."

"You're lying!," he shouted again.

I left my dressing and walked to the bell.

"When my man comes," I said, "I can order you a whisky-and-soda, if you've apologized by then. If you haven't, I shall order you to be thrown out. Which is it to be?"

"My God, if you talk to me like that . . . ," Harborough spluttered.

"Do you apologize?," I asked, as a knock fell on the door. The answer was a dubious gurgle, which I charitably interpreted to mean "yes". "A whisky-and-soda for Sir James," I said. "Once again, I've not seen her since the day after the funeral. You tried at Ashby before paying me the compliment of coming here? And she had vanished? May I ask if you'd given her any reason to run away?"

"You may mind your own business," snapped Harborough.

"You have made your business mine by taking me so flatteringly into your confidence," I answered. "Will you think me rude if I leave you to finish that drink by yourself? I shall be late for dinner if I don't go now."

And so this singular interview ended! Husband and lover fencing—at one moment almost brawling—over the question whether the lover knew where the husband's wife was hiding. That I had stolen his wife or that he had stolen the girl who had promised to be my wife was not present to the mind of either. At some point within the last

few days I had been wondering what would happen if Harborough and I met; our meeting proved, if proof were needed, that none of the potentially dramatic occasions of my life has ever been in any way what I had expected. I had thought to find myself embarrassed, then high-falutin' as I talked of great passions; in fact I was pert and a little theatrical. And Harborough, who had come for my blood, was left, when I saw him for the last time, resting one hand on the rail of my bed and glaring at me over a tumbler of whisky-and-soda.

Outside in Duke Street I hesitated long over my next step. Had Harborough been importuning Anita again? Was she on her way to me now?

The answer was brought me as I breakfasted in bed next day. In the "Court News" of *The Times* I read that Lady Anita Harborough had left London for Paris. By the first post I received a letter giving me the reason of her flight.

III

"SOMETHING has happened," Anita began abruptly, "that I never, for some reason, foresaw; and I feel you have a right to know what it is. Arthur, the doctors tell me I am going to have a baby. Isn't it astonishing that, when we sat up to all hours that night at Ashby, we never considered the possibility of this, the most natural thing in the world? I remember telling you that, when at last we met after all those years, I was yearning above all things to have a child by you. My prayers then seem to have been answered. And I don't quite know where I am.

" That's why I rushed away without telling any one. Not that I can expect to be undisturbed for long. This place is full of English people ; and, if my husband sends a clerk to search the hotel registers, I shall be found in five minutes ; but I wanted time to think.

" Sooner or later I must tell him. I don't suppose he'll have a moment's doubt who the child's father is, but that doesn't matter. I'm afraid I've not been thinking very much about my husband since he ordered me, as my husband, *to come back to him. I'm still thinking, though, of mother ; and I think of you all the time ; but chiefly I'm thinking of this child I'm going to bear. I should hate him not to have a father ; but, even more, I should hate him to be brought up illegitimate. Do you know anything about the law ? In Scotland, I believe, a child is legitimized if the parents marry afterwards. Does this apply to England ? And, in England, can I be divorced for having a child by a man not my husband ? He'd have to prove it, I suppose, and that's impossible. All this is rather important. The child isn't responsible ; and you and I are. If necessary, I must stay with my husband indefinitely, for the child's sake and mother's."*

Unsigned, undated, on ruled sheets torn from a memorandum block, the letter was hardly more remarkable for what it contained than for what it omitted. Of fear, moral or physical, I could find no trace ; and, if Anita's calm was occasionally studied, I felt that she was worried less for herself than for her mother and unborn child. Through her questions ran a note of apology, as though she

was abashed by her ignorance of the law and of life. She did not complain of an ordeal which she would have to face by herself; so far from asking any one to share her troubles, she purposely withheld from me the clue to her whereabouts. "*I don't quite know where I am.*" That was her nearest approach to an appeal.

As soon as I was dressed, I drove to Charing Cross. As I entered the booking-hall, a car drove up behind me; and Sir James Harborough got out. He did not see me; and I was hidden in the crowd by the time that a saluting official had taken charge of him. "You have your ticket, Sir James?," I heard. "And you'll have this in the carriage with you?" The next question paralysed me, for the official was asking if Sir James had his passport; and I remembered for the first time that I had obtained no passport since I wandered round the world before the war.

As I hesitated before turning out of the station, a man unknown to me hurried in and smote Harborough on the back.

"You going to Paris?" he asked. "Gay dog!"

"My wife's there. I'm going to join her," answered Harborough stiffly.

They hurried out of earshot; and some trick of memory conjured up a little scene in which I told Doris Canford that, if I had to meet and beat all comers, at least I was not afraid of Harborough. Perhaps, Doris had warned me, I ought to be. For many weeks now I had been regarding Anita's husband as a man who did not matter; but, when

I saw him striding on to the platform with the paper which announced that his wife had left London for Paris, I realized that a day would come when he would not be able to tell his jovial friends that he was going to join his wife in Paris, when he would have no wife to join, when his enemies and friends would unite in remembering that she had run away from him almost at the door of the church where they were married. On that day Sir James Harborough would be formidable.

I was to find, indeed, without waiting for that day, that he was not a man to be ignored. After applying at the embassy for a passport, I returned home and followed, in imagination, Harborough's progress since he passed out of my sight. Two o'clock, three, five, seven. He had landed, he was in Paris by now, driving from one hotel to another and hunting furiously through the registers. By now, I said at ten o'clock, he must have found her. . . . As pathetic relief, I received a letter from Lady Ashdown, asking if I knew where Anita was to be found. I replied that she was in Paris, whither her husband had gone to join her, but that I did not know her address and could not say whether he had found her.

Two mornings afterwards, as I loitered over my breakfast, I learned that the chase was not yet ended.

"*Since my last letter,*" wrote Anita, "*things have been quickening to a crisis. Some one seems to have told the papers where I'd gone; and my husband crossed by the first boat. We met last night; and I told him everything.*

" I hardly know how to go on, Arthur. I realize that by any standard I have no defence for what I've done, but I could only feel sorry and ashamed that any human being should speak and act as he did. I won't disgust you with his threats of divorce and his cruel, cruel gibes about my ' sainted mother ' and my ' bastard child '. That was mere bullying, to make me accept his terms. He was clever enough to know that you and I should gain by a divorce and that he would lose. In time he calmed down and asked what I proposed we should do. I could say nothing, so he began to dictate his peace. As the price of not divorcing me, he must have an undertaking that you would leave England and that we would never meet again. Then I was to give him a written ' confession ' that the child was not his. There was more to come, but I would not let him finish. That ' confession ' gave him away ! He would chain me up with it so long as he lived ; and, when he died, he would leave it to the world ! He might give his name to the child, but, if it was a boy, he wouldn't let his beloved title pass to him, especially if he hoped to have a son of his own.

" I fastened on the least offensive of his terms and asked him how I could extort an undertaking from you that you would live out of England for the rest of your life. Then I moved towards the door, though this was my room where we were fighting. Before I could get to it, however, he had pocketed the key.

" Until that moment I don't think I'd known what real fear was. I shouldn't have cared if he had struck

me or even killed me, but he never raised a finger. And gradually, from his silence at first and then from the hints he let fall as he made up his mind, I saw what he had in store for me. Divorce? He would never divorce me! It would be too great a blow to his vanity. He would keep me tied to him, almost literally. The pocketing of the key was symbolical.

"After a time I suggested that, if he had nothing more to say, we might go down to dinner. He took my arm along the corridor and in the lift; and, at the end, when I went to get my cloak, he followed me to the door. Even then he wouldn't have let me out of his sight if he'd thought for a moment that I was capable of wandering about Paris at midnight in thin shoes, bare-headed; but I was so desperate by now that I'd have walked across France rather than be locked in the same room with him. He didn't know that there was a second door to the cloak-room. Nor did I. If it had been put there by providence at that moment, I should hardly have been surprised. I had to get away. Everything was conspiring to make me.

"I've no idea where I went. At some time I heard music and found a dance going on. There were a lot of officers—French, British and a few Americans—smoking in the street; and I asked one of them where I was. He told me (I've forgotten) and said that, if I didn't mind the informality, I'd better come in. He was going back to the army of occupation next day; and this was his farewell party.

"He was a man I felt I could trust; and I suddenly

realized that, if he liked, he could get me out of all my difficulties.

"'When you get to Cologne,' I said, 'will you post a letter for me?'

"He promised he would. Was there anything else? I asked him if he would advance me a few pounds on the security of the pearl-necklace I was wearing. He said he'd lend me the money without security. Then I asked if any of his friends would let me have the use of a coat and skirt, as I could hardly go to an hotel in an evening frock, without luggage. He saw that things were serious and suggested that I should stay on in his flat until my troubles, whatever they were, had blown over. I told him that I only wanted some place where I could live until my letter from Cologne had been delivered in Paris.

"That was last night, or, rather, in the early hours of this morning. The party has broken up. My chivalrous friend has left me. And I am waiting till it is safe for me to move."

When I came to the end of the letter, I looked vainly for a date. Like the one before, it was unsigned and without an address. I judged, however, that Anita would not be returning to England that day; and I took the first train to Ashby.

"I have come to give you the latest news from Paris," I told Lady Ashdown. "Anita seems to be quite well and will be back here very soon. I must prepare you for a shock, for several shocks; she will not be coming back with her husband. That's all over."

Lady Ashdown clutched the arms of her chair with tremulous hands.

"Not . . . not . . . ," she repeated faintly.

"She went away to think things over quietly," I explained. "You see, she's going to have a child . . ."

"*Nita?* Arthur, did she tell you so?"

"Yes. And it will not be Harborough's child. I am telling you what she will tell you herself at the first opportunity. You can condemn us if you must, but we were up against something stranger than ourselves. She has told Harborough, who was not unnaturally knocked endways. He bullied her until she ran away, at midnight, in evening dress, through the streets of Paris, where she would be at this moment if an unknown officer hadn't given her a bed in his flat. I'm going back now to meet her."

Apart from her two brief interruptions, Lady Ashdown had listened in silence. She remained silent when I came to the end of my story, though her eyes flashed with a fire that I had never seen before. I should hardly have been surprised if she had solemnly cursed me, but her fury was directed to another quarter.

"You say she'd told him?" she quavered. "He knew the condition she was in? And he drove her away . . .? The brute, the inhuman brute!"

She seemed to have forgotten that I was the cause of Anita's plight and Harborough's anger. As I soothed her with promises that she should be

told the moment I had any news to tell, she clung to my arm, whispering passionately:

"The brute! The brute! The brute! . . ."

That day and the next I presented myself at the barrier when the boat-train came in. On the third day, a slight, hunted figure, with no more luggage than a hand-bag, emerged from the crowd, glancing anxiously from side to side.

"I've a taxi waiting, Anita," I said.

IV

THE landlord of my chambers in Duke Street, who also acted on occasion as banker, valet, counsellor and social cyclopædia to his tenants, had the reputation, among my friends, of being also a consummate blackmailer. If I protested that he had never blackmailed me, they replied darkly: "Not yet." As, in asking him to find Anita a quiet room and to say nothing about it, I gave him an opportunity of plying his reputed trade, it is only fair to say that he did not avail himself of it. Perhaps he was stirred by compassion. Anita fainted in the taxi and had to be carried into the house.

The doctor produced by him on his own initiative prescribed complete rest, if we wished to spare the patient a nervous breakdown, and offered to send in a nurse. This, I felt, would convert Harborough's suspicions into certainties; and for three days and nights I mounted guard, only leaving Anita for an hour in the evening while I walked to the club for air and exercise.

To Lady Ashdown I wrote on the first day, declaring rather sanguinely that all was well, but urging her not to leave Ashby until I had arranged a safe meeting-place. Until Harborough moved, we could not move; and I whiled away the long nights by speculating whether he was starting a hue-and-cry in Paris, Cologne and London simultaneously and whether Benjy Merton, whom I had met in the street between my visits to the station, had said that I was still in England. Ten minutes' questioning in Cologne would convince Harborough that his wife was not there. Would he imagine that she had flitted farther east or that she had doubled on her tracks and hidden herself in Paris? He must know that she had hardly any clothes and no money; he would return, I decided, as soon as he had drawn blank in Cologne; and I prepared for my last fight when I was told that a gentleman had called to see me.

My relief can hardly be described when I found that it was Humfrey Barlow, set free at last from Washington in time to catch the next boat after mine. I found relief ebbing rapidly when he told me he had heard from "the ginger-whiskered feller —what's his name?—Harborough" that I was in London. When next the doctor called, I asked how soon Anita could be moved.

"In a few days, if she's not going far," he answered. "Can you tell me if she has had a shock of any kind?"

"She has."

"Well, no doubt you'll both be guided by what

her own doctor says, but I advise you strongly—*most* strongly—not to subject her to any strain until she's completely recovered."

At the time I was a little disconcerted by his enigmatic manner, but I have since realized that he was displaying exemplary discretion. A doctor with a Jermyn Street practice must learn early to hold his tongue and to mask his surprise. In none of his visits did our friend speak of Anita otherwise than as " the patient " ; he seemed to find nothing unusual in her choosing bachelor chambers for her breakdown ; and, if he knew my name, he never used it.

" Her best chance is to go away for three months' complete change," he recommended on his final visit. " And she mustn't be worried. I don't care who it is that wants to worry her : he mustn't."

And this was his nearest approach to an admission that there might be facts which I had not revealed.

When he had left, I went back to Anita's room. How much she remembered at this time I do not know, for she took the strange room and my own presence for granted.

" What now ?," she asked.

" I want to get you away," I said. " Now, if you go to Ashby, your husband will follow you . . ."

" He'll make me ill, if he bullies me again," said Anita. " And that's bad for our child." She lay without speaking for several moments. " I mustn't stay here. This is the first place he'd search. I suppose I can go back to Paris. I shall want some money . . ."

Her heavy eyelids drooped; and almost immediately she was asleep. Sitting beside her and thinking of Paris, I began to think of the country near Paris, of Fontainebleau and St. Cloud and Versailles. Thinking of Fontainebleau, I thought of the little house where Humfrey Barlow used to bury himself when he had a novel to finish. Thinking of Barlow, I decided to call on him in Chelsea; and, when we had transacted our business, I booked passages by the air mail-service to Le Bourget. Under cover of darkness Anita and I drove away from Duke Street at different times and in opposite directions. She spent the night by herself in an hotel at Richmond; and I met her next morning at the Hounslow aerodrome, after writing to ask if Lady Ashdown could meet me in London two days later.

I will confess that my imagination peopled the empty customs-shed with spies, and that, while we sat in the cabin with engines thundering and propellers whirling on either side of us, I more than half expected to see a car driven furiously across the ground, with Harborough's umbrella waving frantically to the pilot. He had not thought, however, that we should escape by air; and, though I momentarily expected to be told that the weather was too rough for flying or that something was amiss with the machinery, the gods had tired at last of their jesting. After a wild acceleration, the great aeroplane started forward with a jerk, scurried along the grass, quicker and quicker, until of a sudden we no longer felt the bumps.

I looked over the side and saw the ground sinking

as though it were being sucked down from below. Then the machine heeled gently to one side and turned until we were circling again about an aerodrome which dropped away and slid behind us. Everything now fell into perspective: long drab roads with their toy lorries and carts, a boy's railway-lines with pigmy trains, intersecting streets, dull green oases of park and a marvellous symmetry of dolls' houses—miles and miles of them—, all alike, laid out with geometrical precision. From the earth I had never realized the splendid orderliness of straggling, haphazard London.

Anita touched my arm; and I saw the river winding to our right. In a moment we were over it, crossing and recrossing till we swept over the Houses of Parliament and South London to Woolwich. More boy's railway-lines with engines puffing wisps of cotton-wool smoke, more and ever more of that perfect symmetry where I had expected a jungle of slums. A dip to the south; and we had left London behind. A bank of fog, which we avoided by soaring above it; Ashford; and more fog. This time we flew sheer above the clouds, which floated below us like breaths of smoke before disappearing. The fog was behind us; and we dropped a little, then rose again to cross the Channel. Ten thousand feet below us the child's-toy town and harbour must be Folkestone; a moment later I turned to see the white line of Dover Cliffs. It was a rough day for crossing by water, but the sea looked to us like a vast, unmoving expanse of green morocco-leather.

"Boulogne," I wrote and handed the paper to Anita, as we hovered over another harbour and toy town before losing the altitude which we had attained before crossing the Channel. The character of the country, the railways and towns, had changed to something unmistakably French. Half our journey was done; and I began to unpack our luncheon-basket.

A car was waiting at Le Bourget to take us into Paris, where I hired another. We were at Fontainebleau in time for dinner; and I was in Paris again by bed-time. Next day I flew back to London, there to meet Lady Ashdown and to wait for Harborough's next move.

Since Anita stumbled into my arms at Charing Cross, we had never looked more than a week ahead; and I had prepared no answer for the moment when her mother asked what we were going to do now. This was perhaps as well, for in addition to Lady Ashdown I found my rooms occupied by Benjy and Harborough. As we had foreseen, Harborough had made his first cast at Ashby; and it was at Lady Ashdown's suggestion that they were calling, together with old Benjy —self-invited—as the friend of all parties and the composer of all differences.

My last meeting with Harborough had been when he tempestuously invaded my bedroom; since then Anita had told him that we were lovers and I was still dishevelled from the journey I had taken to put her out of his reach for ever. I had no idea whether he would draw a revolver or fall

on his knees to me. The room was in silence when I entered; it remained in silence till I said:

"I understand you've been told. What d'you propose to do about it?"

Silence fell again, to be broken by Harborough's asking very quietly:

"Where is my wife?"

"Resting in a friend's house," I answered. "The doctor ordered three months' change. She is as well as can be expected, but she mustn't be worried. We have to decide what will happen at the end of the three months."

I find it almost impossible to disentangle the debate that followed. All four of us began with well-defined and mutually destructive proposals from which we refused to budge, there were always two altercations going on at the same time and our alliances were sundered as quickly as they were formed. By accident or from policy or by common sense, we did not go behind the fact that Anita had left her husband and was about to bear another man's child. If Harborough and I felt that each had done the other the greatest injury of which a man is capable, we refrained from saying so; and, though the atmosphere was charged with such cold hatred as I have only met when my ambulance was overtaken in a retreat and I saw men fighting hand to hand for their lives, our words and voices would not have disgraced a cabinet council.

To put briefly the proposals which we elucidated only after endless repetition, Harborough undertook

that, if I promised never to see Anita again, he would take her back. Nothing was said about the 'confession'; and I cut Harborough short by telling him that Anita would not come back to him on any consideration. Benjy then suggested that no one should at this stage be committed to anything: Anita and I must see that we could not set up house together; but instead of exile for me, on the one hand, or divorce for her, on the other, we had better all think things over quietly for three months. In effect, we had all three of us had our lesson, in time we should all three of us come to our senses. Lady Ashdown, wincing at the mention of divorce but shivering at the idea of Anita's being handed back to the man who had driven her into the streets, proposed that I should give Harborough his undertaking and that in return Anita should be allowed to live unmolested where she pleased. I, at the other end of the scale, pointed out that Anita and I were bound more closely than if we had signed a dozen contracts and received the blessing of every Church in Christendom. Would not Harborough accept the inevitable?

"And if I say 'No'?," he demanded.

Looking back, I realize that my position was founded on a fact which could not be gainsaid nor changed. Beside the basic fact that we were lovers and that Anita was bearing the fruit of our love, the fact of Harborough's marriage became of no more weight than the paper of the certificate. Little by little I saw the others receding from the

positions which they had vowed never to give up. Benjy, tiring of a discussion in which he had only joined from idle curiosity, gave himself a drink and shambled off to meet a man at his club. Lady Ashdown, failing to persuade us that Harborough and I should both give Anita up, hardened herself to face a divorce in preference to surrendering her beloved child to be tortured. Even Harborough became gradually convinced that I should not give him the promise he wanted.

"Then you'll let her be divorced?," he asked.

"That's your affair," I said.

Throughout the dreary wrangle I had been fearing that he would refuse to have a divorce. If he kept her technically tied to him, I doubted whether Anita would defy the world; then she, for her mother's sake, and I, for our own, must have refused a clandestine alliance. This I do not think Harborough realized. He could not bear that his wife should belong to another man.

"And the child?," he asked between his teeth. "You'll let the child be bastardized?"

"I have no say in the matter." It was this, I knew, that would make Anita accept almost any terms; and, though I dreaded losing her at the last moment, I had to respect her deepest wishes.

"You seem unwilling to follow Lady Ashdown's proposal, which would at least have secured that the child did not suffer."

"You'd like me to give my name to your child, while you . . . *you* . . ."

"We don't seem likely to reach any agreement,"

I broke in. "If you're going for a divorce, go for it . . ."

"If I go for a divorce, it will be such a divorce that you two will never be able to shew your faces in decent company again," Harborough threatened.

"You must do what you please about that. Take care, though, that you don't make yourself ridiculous."

V

It was an ill-advised taunt.

Harborough's rage was compounded of many elements; he had made a bad investment, he had failed in an undertaking near his heart, I had succeeded where he had failed, he had been tricked by the very people on whom he had so long waited to revenge himself. For all I know he cherished a skin-deep liking for Anita. The dregs of his bitter cup, however, were only reached when he began to imagine the comments of his numerous enemies and rivals: in two continents he would be known as the man whose wife had run from him after five minutes of marriage. If in some way he could veil this humiliation, he would surrender everything else; if he could not veil it, he would convert ridicule into sympathy by pretending that he had married a wanton and turned her adrift when he found her out. When it was too late to recall my gibe, I felt sorry for it; and I was sorrier still next day when Benjy called alone to make a final appeal.

"No need to tell you why *I'm* here," he began breezily, ranging round my pictures and tossing his hat into a chair. "I say, that's jolly! Degas, isn't it? Thought so. Well, old man, if you won't see the rights and the wrongs of the position, I hope you'll at least see the devilish tight corner *I'm* in. Ashdown was a friend. Poor old Lady Ashdown . . . I'm about all she has to turn to. Harborough . . . well, I've known him a good many years. And you're an old friend; you won't mind my calling you a very *dear* old friend." He wrung my hand, breathing whisky over me the while. "I used to say, when Doris was a slip of a girl, 'Thank you very much; what's good enough for Doris is good enough for me.' And I apply that to you, old man. . . . Now, we'll have a show-down at once, with your leave; I'm here because I couldn't let things drift. 'You're an old fool, Benjy,' I said; 'what happens to the man who tries to stop a dog-fight?,' I said. 'Does he or does he not get bitten by all dogs concerned? Answer me that,' I said. I turned back, started out again, turned back again. Then I saw that I *couldn't* let things drift. 'Benjy,' I said to myself, 'you're *for* it,' I said. 'On with your hat,' I said. 'Go and see the lad,' I said. 'It may cost you his friendship,' I said, 'and you can't afford to lose that. But you're between the devil and the deep sea,' I said, 'and you've just got to do your damnedest.' Lord, I've made myself hot, walking here. You've not such a thing as a whisky and soda, I suppose?"

As he had begun, so he went on. The interview was trying in that it was long; it was easy to negotiate in that Benjy Merton, the world's most selfish old pantaloon, did not put his heart into the job. He drank half a decanter of whisky, admired my grit and feeling, denounced the Ashdowns in every generation and degree, became maudlin about Doris, and stumbled over the mat. His one hint of value was given at the door, as an afterthought and not in any way as a message.

"A divorce," he predicted, "will be devilish unpleasant for every one."

"We shan't defend it," I replied.

"Yes, but you know what people will say? They'll think that you and the gal had a little affair and that she was married off in a hurry to cover up the consequences."

"Is Harborough saying that?," I asked. "If so, put it to him that the easiest and also the pleasantest way of covering up the consequences would have been for me to marry her."

"Yes, but you were in America. And the Ashdowns were saying that you weren't coming back."

"Harborough means to make a circumstantial lie of it," I said.

"You've no message for him?" asked Benjy.

"He'll find me here for a day or two, if he has anything to propose."

Sir James Harborough did not honour me with a call. His methods of attack wasted less time and struck harder, though he cut off his only line of

retreat. On the day after Benjy's fruitless embassage I received a letter addressed to *The Lady Anita Harborough, C/o Arthur Weston Esqre.* I forwarded it to Fontainebleau and spent the rest of the day among the shipping offices of the city. From Southampton or Cherbourg I could get with equal ease to North or South America, thence to the West Indies or the South Sea Islands. My enquiries were barely completed when I received a reply to the note which I had enclosed with Harborough's letter:

"I said I would do nothing without consulting you, but something has to be done now. When can you come and talk things over? Anita."

I telegraphed that I was crossing by that day's air-mail; and Anita met me with a car at Le Bourget.

"He's sent me a formal summons to come back to him," she explained, pulling Harborough's letter out of her bag. "What d'you advise me to do?"

"That's the preliminary to divorce-proceedings," I answered. "Personally, I've always regarded that as the only possible solution. I believe that even your mother would rather see you divorced than driven back to him, though she wants you to be left to live in peace at Ashby."

"Without you? There wouldn't be much peace," she sighed.

"And in any event Harborough has refused. He hopes to get you back by hitting at you through the child."

Anita sat without speaking till the car entered Paris.

"I believe I'd go back, if that were the only way of keeping the innocent mite out of a scandal," she whispered. "If I go back, that knocks the divorce on the head. And I needn't *stay* with him."

"He'll have you shadowed and divorced at sight if you ever meet me. Am I to be given up? Have I no interest in our child? Aren't two parents better than one? If the divorce comes on quickly, we should be married before he was born."

The driver turned round for directions; and Anita suggested that we should go to the Ritz for tea. I should have preferred some place rather less full of English and Americans, but the choice was unexpectedly helpful. As I washed my hands, da Ricci hailed me and demanded news of our friends.

"By the way, you know the Harboroughs," he recalled. "Is it true that she left him absolutely at the door of the church and refuses to come back?"

"Is that the story?," I asked. "Where did you hear it?"

He looked foolish a moment later, when Anita joined me; but I respected him, for the only time in my life, when he murmured:

"I beg your pardon. I had no business to say that about a friend of yours."

Others were neither so indiscreet nor so courageous

in covering an indiscretion. The Silverdales, unless they had become suddenly short-sighted, cut us deliberately. Humfrey Barlow, waiting by a lift-door, nodded cordially enough, though he was glad, I thought—and he has admitted it since—that we did not thrust our way in to speak to his party. In the hall I caught sight of a man and woman who had lunched with me a few weeks before. The husband, with a man's inexpert technique in cutting, half returned my bow before thinking better of it; the wife stared ahead of her like a figure in an Egyptian frieze. Harborough had done his work quickly; and he had done it well.

I was stupidly slow in apprehending his attack and realizing that we were social lepers. Indeed, the truth was forced upon me less by the hostility of those who knew us than by the curiosity of those who did not. Anita became restless under the stare of so many eyes and, when she enquired why so many people took an interest in us, I replied that her husband had fed the hungry for many years and that, if there was to be a breach between him and her, the hungry were no doubt anxious to come down on the right side.

"Let's go for a drive and have dinner somewhere," she proposed. "He . . . well, he seems to have answered all our questions for us."

We left Paris by the Versailles road and plunged quickly into the woods. Anita said little; and I could see that her lips were trembling and her eyes full of tears.

"I haven't made a great success of life, have

I?," she murmured tremulously. "I *did* want to make every one happy!"

"As I get older, I only aim at making as few people as possible *un*happy."

She was silent for long; and I heard her whisper at length "father":

"I'm *glad* he's dead. I should feel I'd killed him."

"You don't feel . . . ?," I began, then stopped. I was about to say: "*You don't feel that these unburied dead did their well-intentioned best to kill you, body and soul?*"

"Don't feel?," she echoed.

"Anything! Try to forget . . ."

"I *can't* forget . . ."

"Can't I make you? Anita, my dear one! You cannot serve the living and the dead."

The car swept through the woods with the drone of a giant bumble-bee. The sun, sinking low behind the trees, sent slanting, splintered shafts of light through the windows and flushed Anita's cheeks to the warmth of pink rose-leaves. There were gleaming tears on her eye-lashes, but she smiled in her sleep. I had said nothing, done nothing, but she had twisted herself into my arms like a tired child. Once she stirred when the driver stopped to light the lamps.

"Are we there yet?," she asked.

"I don't even know where we're going."

"I've told *him*," she answered, nodding at the driver.

We started again and drove to a place where

the woods grew thin and ended in a sweep of rolling grassland. There was a single house, lighted by a single lamp in one window; and we might well have been a thousand miles from Paris.

"Here we dine," she announced.

"My darling, we shan't get anything *here*!," I protested.

"Oh yes, we shall! Wonderful omelettes and hot rolls. This was a discovery of mine when I was motoring the other day. I took it for a sign. . . . Arthur, we're outlaws. You must take me far, far, far away. I'm disgraced, I'm disgracing you, but I'm trying to harden my heart and forget every one else, . . . forget it's a sin. Mother . . . She has been prepared for it. And my husband has paid me full measure, pressed down and running over . . . You *will* be good to me? You're all I have in the world! You *will* help me to forget?"

As we stepped out of the car, a woman came to the door and welcomed Anita with a torrent of greeting. I found that a table had been set in the garden by the back of the house; and we were hardly seated before our hostess appeared with the omelettes and a bottle of wine.

"Dites donc, madame," said Anita, "comment appelez-vous cette maison?"

"C'est Le Bout du Monde, madame," answered our hostess.

"There is a wonderful peace here," I said.

"One can forget . . . ," whispered Anita.

I felt then, as I remember now, that something —even so—was wanting. My happiness would have been complete, would only have been complete, if I could have told Doris. . . .

THE END

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